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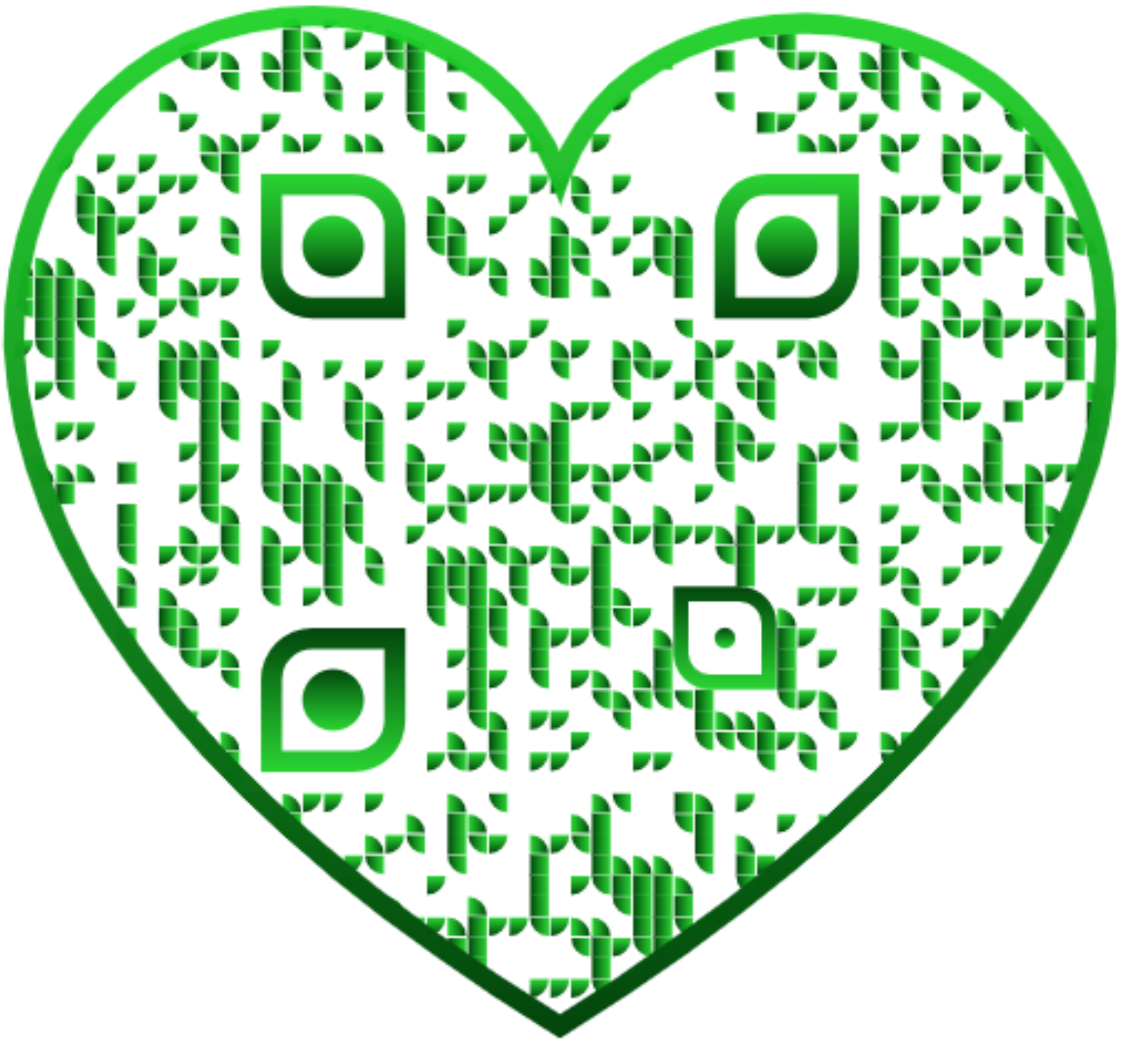

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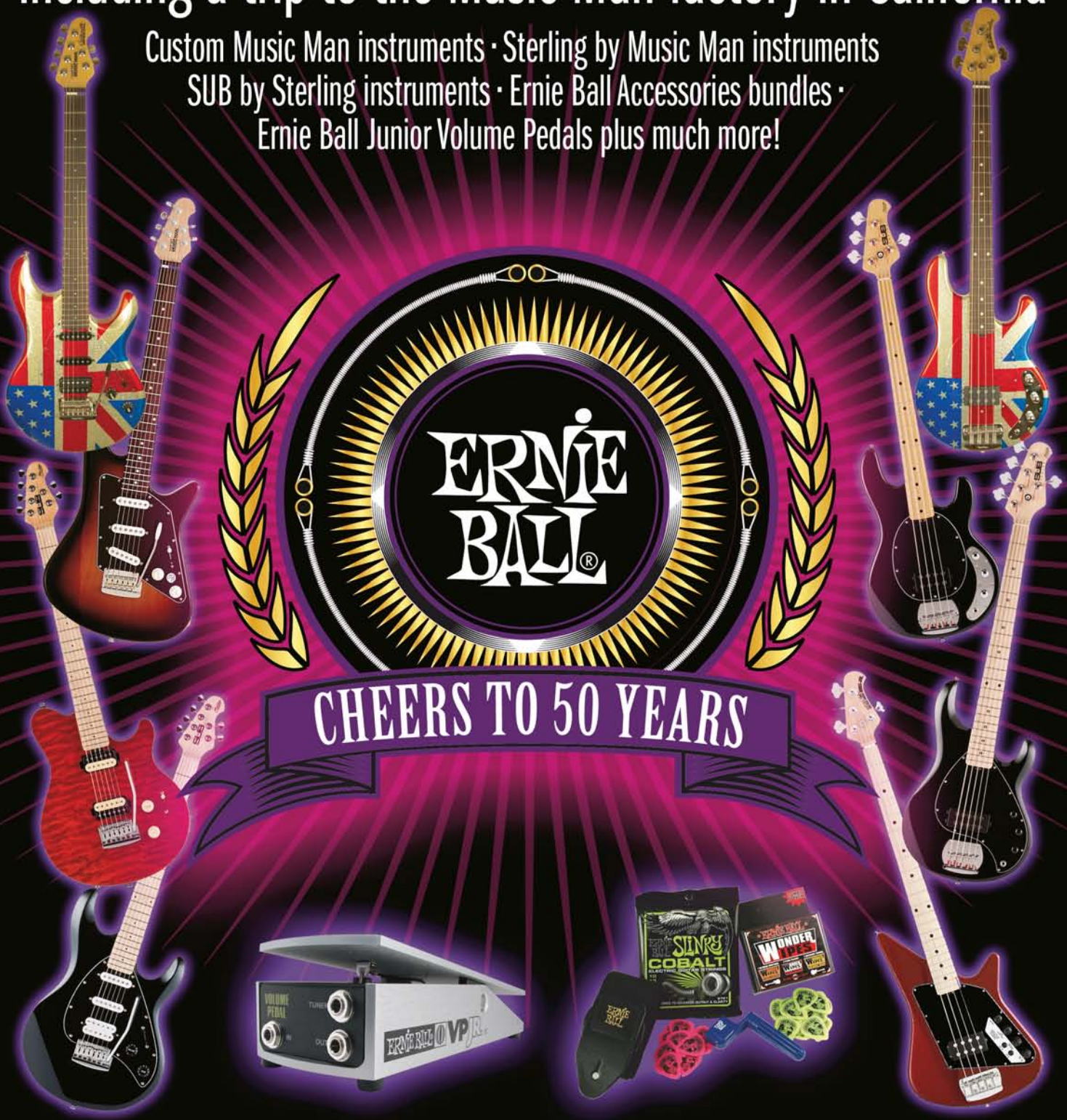

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GRACE NOTE

Slap bass is a technique that divides bass players, as you'll know if you've ever read *BGM's* regular – and always controversial – Bassically Speaking section, where low-enders battle over the value of the slap and the pop. You may love it. You may hate it. Either way, you can't ignore it, and over his long career, our cover star Mark King of Level 42 has elevated slap to stratospheric heights, scoring a catalogue of hits along the way. But there's more to King than just slap bass, as he reveals in our in-depth interview, executed by Paul Geary (no stranger to the mighty thumb himself). Elsewhere in this issue we meet Peter Hook, sometime of Joy Division and New Order, who talks about his new book and the gear that made him famous; John Wetton, who has played in more supergroups than you've changed strings; and Ashdown founder Mark Gooday, who takes us into Ashdown HQ for a chat about how his amps became industry icons.

As well as these close encounters with the great and the good of the bass world, this issue shoots both barrels when it comes to bass reviews and techniques. For a few issues now we've been making a deliberate attempt to balance low-budget gear with high-spec equipment, and beginner's education with expert masterclasses – and in this issue we think we've hit the perfect spectrum of coverage. Take a look at our four-bass Vintage round-up: between them, the price tags of these four instruments don't match up to the Mayones or Status basses reviewed in these pages. To us, that doesn't really matter: what we care about is whether each bass deserves its price point. Whether you're paying 200 quid or three grand, bassists need to know what they're getting, and our job is to get that information to you without bias or prejudice. Why not read the issue, drop us a line at Facebook, Twitter or by email, and let us know what you think? Enjoy!

Joel McIver, Editor

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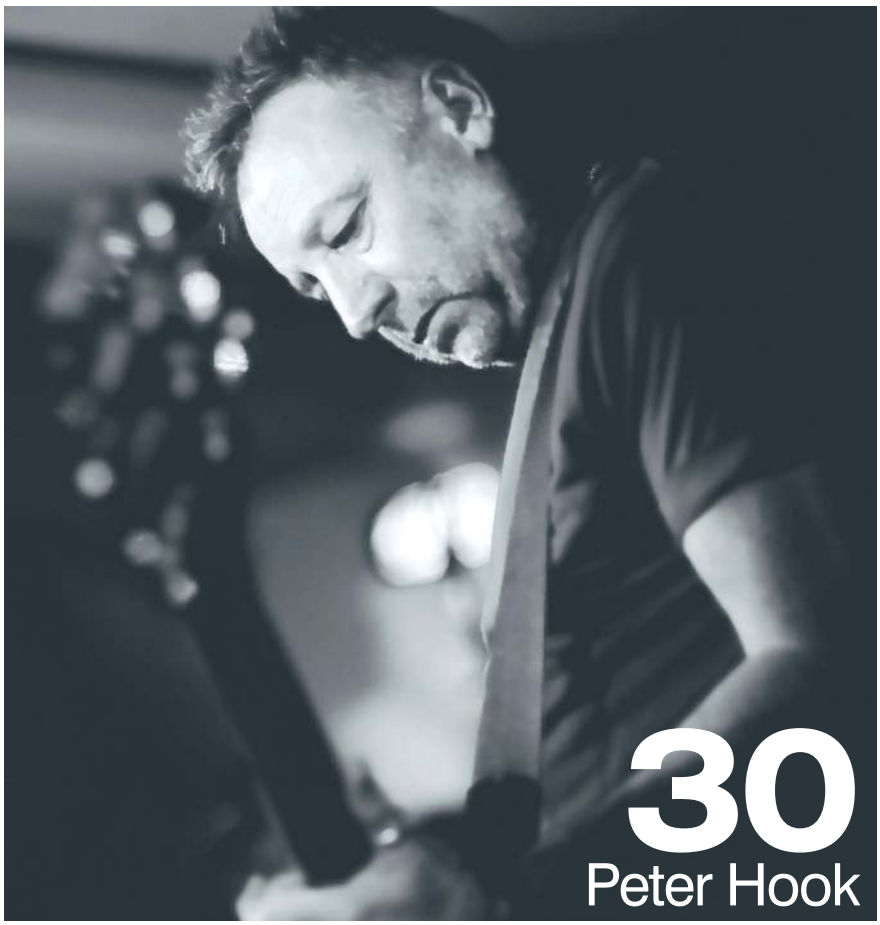

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THE LOW DOWN

News and grooves from the bass dimension

CUSTOM CABS

Doctor and the Medics bass player Jon Randle has started up as a bass cab custom artist, under the guise of Jonny Cab Customs. As the pictures demonstrate, his stuff is guaranteed to get the attention of your audience members – or perhaps just a load of other bass players will want to borrow them. "I love the sound from my Ashdown 4x8s," Jon told us, "but after 12 years on tour with Doctor and the Medics, they were looking their age. I wanted to get them restored to their former glory, but after an unfruitful search for someone who could do this, I took the job on myself, and Jonny Cab Customs was born. My Ashdown 4x8 cabs have been totally transformed with a stunning orange vinyl covering, full grill paint job, and additional LEDs for an eye-catching effect. We're also working on a classic red and white Starsky & Hutch Ford Gran Torino look for a client who spotted mine at a summer festival." Fancy customising your cabs? Contact Jon at jon.randle@hotmail.co.uk.

LONDON CALLING

Nate Watts, Guy Pratt And Lee Rocker Hit The London Bass Guitar Show

The London Bass Guitar Show, in association with Bass Guitar Magazine, is delighted to announce three more additions to the line-up at its 2013 show, scheduled for March 2 and 3, 2013, at London's prestigious Olympia venue. As well as David Ellefson of Megadeth, Nate Watts (Stevie Wonder), Guy Pratt (Pink Floyd and others) and Lee Rocker (Stray Cats) will also be performing at the event.

Detroit native Nate began his career as a trumpet player in a trio with Ray Parker, Jr. of *Ghostbusters* fame. Switching to bass and inspired by James Brown and Motown, Nate joined Stevie Wonder's band in 1974. Over the last decade he has also served as Wonder's musical director and received the International Bassist Award in 2010.

Meanwhile, Lee Rocker made his mark singing, playing, standing on, spinning and rocking his giant upright bass in the legendary Stray Cats, who have sold nearly 10 million albums and garnered 23 gold and platinum certified records worldwide. He also heads up a solo band and earlier this year joined the cast of the Broadway hit musical *Million Dollar Quartet*.

Guy Pratt is well known to thousands of fans who have seen him not just performing with the world's biggest bands (Pink Floyd, we're looking at you) and on innumerable sessions (you may have heard of up-and-coming popstrel Madonna), but also on his acclaimed spoken-word stand-up tours. We're fortunate to have a bassist with as huge a range of talents on board as Mr. Pratt.

Together these world-class bass players cover a wide range of styles and tones, combining to provide visitors with a bass experience that simply does not exist anywhere else. Visit www.londonbassguitarshow.com or www.facebook.com/londonbassguitarshow for more info and to buy all tickets, including weekend tickets for £30.

GO WEST

Bass players seeking a break should head to Exeter, Devon on November 17 and 18, where the annual Mansons Guitar Show will be taking place at the city's Corn Exchange. The show, which marks guitar shop Mansons' 20th anniversary, has traditionally hosted a stellar line-up of guests, including John Paul Jones of up-and-coming beat combo Led Zeppelin. This year, Mikey D from Skindred and many other guest artists will be joining a diverse range of manufacturers, including Fender, Markbass, Orange Amplification, Rotosound and Yamaha. If you bump into Mansons bass guru and *BGM* founding editor Adrian Ashton, buy that man a pint. Visit www.mansons.co.uk and www.facebook.com/mansonsguitarshop for more information.

FOO FENDER

Foo Fighters bass player Nate Mendel is the latest rocker to get his own Precision, the lucky so-and-so. A long-time 1971 P-Bass user, he has used his own bass as the template for the Nate Mendel P-Bass, which features special body contours, extra-slim neck and nut width, a lightly worn candy apple red finish with a black pickguard, a Seymour Duncan Quarter Pound split single-coil pickup, a Badass II bridge and Mendel's signature on the headstock. It also comes with a spare neck plate engraved with a hybrid Foos/Fender logo and a deluxe gig bag. "The final product is exactly what I wanted," says our man. "Fender was great and took the bass to find a way to copy the shape of the neck: I'm super-excited about it. Once you land on a P-Bass, that's kind of where you stay."

ROAD WARRIOR

The Pro's On The Road Survival Kit

Name: Calvin Wilson
Current gig: The Maginot Band
Website: themaginotband.bandcamp.com

1 Fender 1972 Mustang Bass

I have played with this bass live for around five years, and wouldn't play anything else. It has a lovely warm tone and takes up less space than most guitars, although it does have a tendency to die every now and then…

2 Phillips screwdriver

When the bass does die, some make-do electric work is usually needed.

3 Duct tape

Why wouldn't you need duct tape?

4 A pillow

I like my sleep.

DEAR JOHN

John Hornby Skewes & Co. Ltd. will be showcasing a wide range of bass guitars and related products at the London Bass Guitar Show 2013. The Trev Wilkinson-designed Fret-King line will turn heads as usual. Beautiful and inspiring to look at, hear and play, models will be on display from the new Black Label range, as well as the classic Blue Label, Green Label and STVDIO lines. Vintage basses are hugely popular thanks to their great all-round performance and prices. On display will be models from the classic ReIssued series, the distressed ICON series and the electro-acoustic bass series.

Another Trev Wilkinson success story, Italia basses are cooler than cool. The Mondial, Rimini and the Maranello – favourite of Manic Street Preacher Nicky Wire – will all be on display. The super-distinctive Danelectro Longhorn, beloved of so many great bassists over the years, is sure to get pulses racing. Also on show will be the newly rereleased Danelectro '56 and Hodad basses.

The ever-popular Encore bass range, ideal for beginners, will show off its superb E4 and E20 Blaster guitar packs. Ergonomic designs with great playability and tone – and at unbeatable prices. Also on display from JHS will be highlights from the Carlsbro, Kustom, Kinsman, Fishman, Dunlop, Snark, Guitar Tech, Grover and HK Audio ranges of bass-related equipment.

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TRIUMVIRATE

Each month we select three essential albums from a genre or player.
This month:

STANLEY CLARKE

1 STANLEY CLARKE, *SCHOOL DAYS*

This, the fourth solo album from Stanley Clarke, revolutionised the art of jazz bass playing. His previous solo efforts had shown his skill as a fine composer, arranger and leading bassist. On *School Days* he exploded preconceptions of what it meant to be a bassist. The title track alone makes this LP a necessity for any serious bassist, with its strummed riff and wrist-breaking slap parts, but when you couple in Clarke's lead work on his piccolo bass, and the interplay between the legendary musicians who feature alongside him, this is essential stuff.

2 RETURN TO FOREVER, *RETURN TO FOREVER*

Chick Corea's jazz-fusion outfit equals Weather Report in terms of influence. The one constant, aside from Chick's tasty piano chops, has been Stanley Clarke. On the band's debut album Clarke plays both electric and double bass, proving he's a master of both. The album is heavily Latin influenced, and Clarke weaves in and out of the songs, providing solid support and, at other times, flexing his muscles more aptly. The use of the bass on 'Sometime Ago – La Fiesta' to interlink the three distinct movements of the piece is a masterstroke.

3 RETURN TO FOREVER, *WHERE HAVE I KNOWN YOU BEFORE*

By the time this album was released in 1974, Return To Forever had enjoyed a surprising amount of commercial success. On this album Clarke had begun to truly define his sound, with his own track, 'Vulcan Worlds', giving him copious room to prove his talent. It offers glimpses of themes and techniques that would be integral to his later solo work. The rest of the album is a bass *tour de force*, laced with some of the moogiest keyboards ever heard.

Why we love… Flea

Standout Tracks: 'Aeroplane', 'Naked In The Rain', 'Give It Away', 'Californication', 'Under The Bridge', 'Scar Tissue', 'True Men Don't Kill Coyotes'
Recommended Albums: *Mother's Milk, Blood Sugar Sex Magik, One Hot Minute, Californication*

What happens when you mash up punk, funk and hard rock? The Red Hot Chili Peppers. OK, so they may have descended into making bland, middle-of-the-road fare that gets lapped up by people who wouldn't know real rock music if it drop-kicked them in the face, but once upon a time the Funky Monks were one of the most outrageously talented alternative bands on the scene. The centrepiece of the band has always been Flea (aka Michael Balzary). Just a little bit wild-eyed and bonkers, the boy sure knows how to play that bass. Flea's early bass parts were high-powered slap explosions, influenced by the groove of Larry Graham and the balls-out aggression of the Ramones. By the time the Chilis hit big in the early 1990s, Flea was able to demonstrate his taste and restraint on ballads such as 'Under The Bridge', his deep groove on 'Give It Away' and funky slap licks on 'Aeroplane'. Embracing pick playing since *Californication* (1999), Flea has always managed to impress on bass – and don't forget, he used to perform naked apart from a sock on his dick. Respect.

REVOLVER

Every month we reveal a bass-line that we can't get out of our heads…

This Month: 'SHOW DON'T TELL'

Bassist Geddy Lee, Rush
Album *Presto (1989)*

Rush weren't too happy with their 1989 album *Presto*, which they felt contained great songs, but lacked a certain something. One thing the album's opening track doesn't lack is that typical Geddy Lee magic on bass. Check out the ultra-tight unison riffing in the intro, which gives way to a chunky, melodic verse line. As usual, Geddy's growling pick-esque tones are upfront in the mix. At nearly three and half minutes into the track he takes one of his most famous solos, which he follows up with some funky 16th note work, grooving tightly with Neil Peart's massive drums. Best bassist of all time? Quite possibly.

WIN!

Level 42, TC Electronic And Rockschool Gear

Never let it be said that we at *BGM* don't take care of our readers. This month you can nab a splendid TC Electronic BH250 head worth £235 (and it really is splendid: see page 57 for Dave Clarke's rave review), one of two sets of Rockschool's extremely tasty 2012 *Bass* syllabus grade books, worth £129 each, and a luxury edition of Level 42's *Running In The Family* box set, worth at least £30 of anyone's pocket money. To win the booty, email the editor with the answers to these questions, and don't hang about.

To win the TC Electronic BH250: Which mildly amusing TV cartoon character went by the nickname 'TC'?

A Top Chameleon
B Top Carp
C Top Cat

To win a set of Rockschool books: Which actor starred in the film *School Of Rock*?

A Charlton Heston
B Jack Black
C Bruce Forsyth

To win a Level 42 box set: Which author famously wrote about the number 42?

A Douglas Adams
B Geoffrey Chaucer
C JK Rowling

HAND ON HARTKE

The lucky reader who won our Hartke David Ellefson combo competition is Nigel Rozier. Well done that man, and thanks to all who entered.

The winners of our Steve Harris competition are Stewart Mclean, Andrea Spinelli, Cliff Davis, Peter Jordan and Ian Thomas. Nice work, chaps.

SEEING RED

The mighty Tony Levin's new photo book, Crimson Chronicles, Volume 1 – The 80s, is now available for iPhone and iPad at the iTunes App Store. "This is not just pages of photos. I wanted to take advantage of the latest technologies in books for tablets to bring this King Crimson experience to a whole new level," says Tony. "We've added interactivity, voice commentary and anecdotes, animation, videos and new original music to the photos. We've got some surprising features that I'm sure will be enjoyed." The book features the early years of King Crimson, with Robert Fripp, Bill Bruford, Adrian Belew, and Levin, and covers life on the road, backstage, rehearsals, composition and more. There's also six tracks of previously unreleased music by Levin written for this book, three new videos, hundreds of images from Levin's collection, photo stacks of snapshots that readers can manipulate as real photos, zoom, rotate and even 'dig into' to read comments and listen to anecdotes specially recorded for this book, negative strips with 'peel off' commentary, crimson wallpapers, backstage pass-shaped thumbnails to navigate the book, photo sharing with friends via email, Facebook and Twitter, and the keys to his house. OK, not the keys to his house, but pretty much anything else you can can think of. Visit http://bit.ly/tonylevinKC80s for info.

Deftones make their return, with bassist Sergio Vega (second left) standing in for Chi Cheng

BASS IN THE USA

Jon D'Auria dives into the pumpkin pie of the bass world

It's Thanksgiving here in the States, and we bass players have plenty to be thankful for this month, with several iconic bassists and their bands releasing new albums and heading out on tour. It's also time we gave thanks that we don't have to load in as much gear as our drummer counterparts. Though anyone who has hefted an old SVT around might contest that.

First up, legendary rock band The Who have announced their 36-date *Quadrophenia* tour, on which they will perform the 1973 rock opera in its entirety. Holding down the bass duties for the tour is none other than the master himself, Pino Palladino. While Palladino will undoubtedly go down as one of the greatest players ever in his own right, the responsibility of filling the shoes of another iconic bassist in John Entwistle is no easy task. The original *Quadrophenia* album contained such awe-inspiring bass tracks as 'The Real Me', 'Cut My Hair', 'The Dirty Jobs', '5:15' and countless other masterpieces, which Palladino has replicated in perfect fashion on previous tours.

We caught up with him at an event in LA, where the bassist had this to say about playing with The Who: "I've been very fortunate to land the gigs that I have, but playing with The Who has truly been a dream come true. I've been a fan of them for a long time, and John's playing really impacted my approach to the bass. I'm trying to honour his lines and stay true to his role in the band, while really enjoying every moment of the gig at the same time." The tour is scheduled to make 15 stops in the US this month, beginning on 1 November at the BankAtlantic Center in Sunrise, Florida, and concluding its first leg on 29 November at the Allstate Arena in Chicago, Illinois. The tour continues during February, making it's way across the US. Visit www.thewho.com for details.

Another group of rock legends, Aerosmith, release their new record on 6 November. *Music From Another Dimension!* is the band's 15th studio album, and of course features the hard rock and blues-influenced bass-lines of veteran low-ender Tom Hamilton. This marks the band's first all-original album since 2001's *Just Push Play*. Hamilton played a large role in the writing of this album, receiving credits on 'Beautiful', 'Tell Me', 'Lover Alot' and 'Up On A Mountain'. On the latter of these, Hamilton plays bass and takes over the duty of lead vocals from Steven Tyler. As we reported before, Hamilton was diagnosed with throat and tongue cancer in August 2006, but has since made a full recovery. The material on the new album features the blues-rock and glam-metal sound that first put Aerosmith on the map, and Hamilton's bass has a strong presence. His Sadowsky basses make for a remarkable tone that holds up throughout the entire album, whether his playing is sparse or busy. To celebrate, Aerosmith will be playing four concerts: Oklahoma City on 8 November, Madison Square Gardens on 20 November, Revel Beach, New Jersey on 23 November and Columbus, Ohio on 25 November. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster, and the album through iTunes.

It's proving to be a heavy month, as alternative metal titans Deftones prepare to release their seventh album *Koi No Yokan* on 13 November. With Chi Cheng still recovering from a coma, Sergio Vega of the famed post-hardcore band Quicksand has filled in once again. The band claim that this album is the closest thing they've done to their breakthrough record *White Pony* (2000), and if that's true, fans of Vega's driving lines should be excited to scope his intricate and entrancing playing. The album's first single, 'Leathers', showcases Vega's brutal picking technique, which differs from the fingerstyle method of Cheng, though both have a similar tone that amply fills out the bottom of Deftones' sound. Vega picked up where Cheng left off with bass tunings; his Fender Jaguar basses are tuned to CGCF and to C#G#C#F#, rattling venues through his Orange cabinets. The band will head back out on the road the day after the album release to play the new material live, starting on 14 November at the Palladium Ballroom in Dallas, Texas and ending on 18 November at the House of Blues in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information visit www.deftones.com.

And finally, a special shout-out to beloved San Francisco Bay Area bassist Darryl Anders and his band Agape Soul, who have just released their new album *Believe In Love*. Anders' credits include Tower Of Power, Bonnie Hayes and Booker T. Jones, and this record, his first solo effort, exhibits a smooth tone and deep groove. It's most definitely worth a spin. ■

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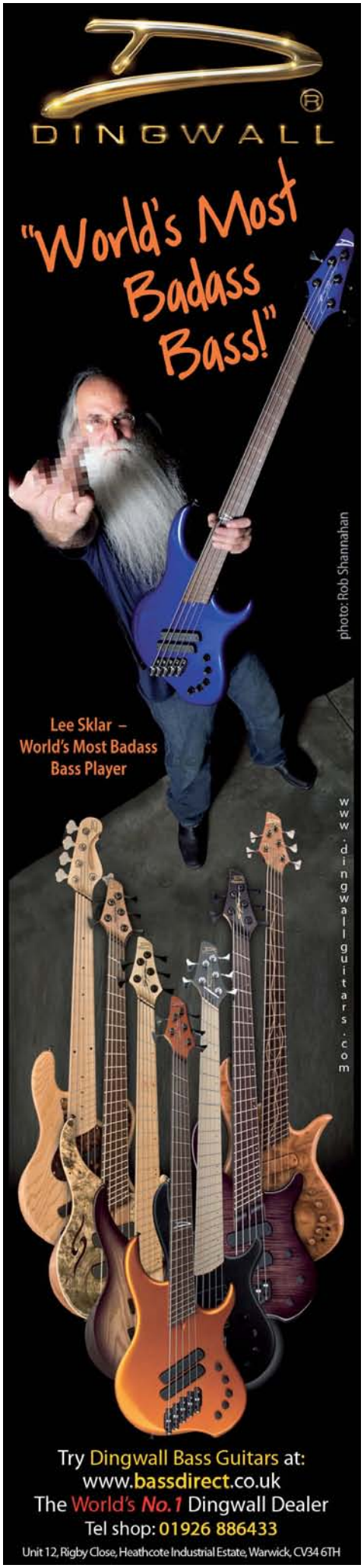
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THE BASS SCHOLARSHIP

With winner Ellen O'Reilly

Fáilte *BGM* friends! I'm back in London and continuing to study at the Institute. It's great to be back among so much musical diversity, and alongside such inspiring musicians. In this incredible city you can walk into a club and discover a wealth of talent, including excellent bands like The Manic Shine and Opinaut. Since returning, I've landed a couple of jobs playing with Party XS and Earth Wind For Hire, who are an established function band based in London. I'll need quite a few rehearsals to get up to speed with their extensive set, and there are plenty of tunes by Chic and Sister Sledge to get my bass-playing teeth into. For the gigs I'll also be singing backing vocals and getting dressed up to the max!

In addition, I'll soon be heading back to Ireland to record bass and backing vocals for Shannon & The Shortcuts' new single, 'Sapphires'. I was back over there over the summer, and played at Electric Picnic, a music and arts festival in Laois, where I did five sets with both Shannon and Preacher's Son, and even met Bono backstage! I also came back to play with E-mute, as their bassist Svetlana Vassileva was away.

Now my enrollment on the BMus degree is complete, and my new books have arrived. To my delight, we're going to be studying percussion, keyboards and vocals alongside the bass. These skills will no doubt add another dimension to my musicianship and make me that bit more employable. I'm also looking forward to being taught by the brilliant John Currie again, and can't wait to learn from Alan Mian and Paul Scott. The classes we will be taking this semester include aural and transcribing, harmony and theory, reading, styles, songwriting, history of popular music and techniques.

There are 16 bass students on the degree, and we've been split into two groups for all classes, and then split up into a further two groups for our live performance classes. We bassists are in high demand as there are a lot of guitarists in our year. I'm looking forward to seeing what's on offer musician-wise on this course, and will be on the lookout for a new drummer for my own band, Fools Up Front, because our original drummer Nicholas Musset returned to Paris after the higher diploma. So, until next time, I'll be stalking the drum booths! Slán!

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ELX-170-ADV-EN-OCT12

BASSICALLY SPEAKING

Hot, happening, or otherwise cool bassists compress their bass knowledge into a couple of paragraphs. No easy task, believe us…

LUIS MARRUFO

Incite

Don't get big-headed about playing everything you know on the bass, and don't try to be too intricate. Slapping on bass is useful because it can add dynamics to certain parts of songs, but you have to know when and when not to use it. I can play the craziest lines all day long, but you have to remember you're in a band, not doing a solo gig.

I would describe my own bass style as very alien, and most of the time I don't even know where I come up with the stuff that I write. I play a five-string mainly, so that I have a string to land on. When you hit the fourth string and land on the fifth, it creates this click/thump noise that I absolutely love. My first bass was a five-string Ibanez 885; it was a really great instrument, and I wouldn't mind having one again in the future. Mine was stolen out of my car, but, as things turned out, it wasn't all bad news. At that point I finally decided to move on to better gear and get my dream bass. I almost think that Ibanez was meant to be stolen!

My bass heroes are Justin Chancellor, Ryan Martinie, Flea, P-Nut, Sam Rivers and Fieldy, and the greatest bass player that ever lived was Cliff Burton. He wrote like a beast and played like one. From him I learned that headbanging and shredding were what I wanted to do.

If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, it would have to be Mudvayne's *LD50* album. Holy crap, that bass tone is the bee's knees. It seems like the producer forgot to turn the bass down like most do. But it is definitely the best I've ever heard.

www.facebook.com/inciteband

GEAR

Bass Warwick Thumb NT
Effects None
Amp Warwick

MIKE POCKETT

Strobe Circus

There's a dub and reggae bass feel on most of the tracks I play on, and I'm also really into my drum 'n' bass; it's amazing when you drop something solid that melts faces. My set-up is really sub-heavy and the effects channel covers the high end, so I'm pretty much covered on extended range. Slapping is valid but it's not something I really use in what I'm writing at the minute. If you can play less, you're probably playing too much. Get a feel for where the pocket is and smash it. My first bass was a Yamaha RBX270, and my favourite bass ever was a Japanese fretless Jazz copy that I had a few years ago. It was mega-punchy and had such a good neck. It's hard for me to pinpoint my individual bass heroes; I find inspiration from listening to a lot of electronic music and emulating those sounds.

There are so many great players about, but I'm trying to focus on what I want to achieve at the minute. The greatest bass player that ever lived is probably Jaco Pastorius. If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, it would be London Elektricity's *Syncopated City*. It has a great use of different sounds, both live bass and programmed. I also love the low end sounds of Submotion Orchestra's *Finest Hour*, which sounds true to itself on any system and will just blow your mind. Don't try too hard to be or sound like anyone else, just play the way you want to be heard. Our new EP *Amber* is out now and we have two new videos coming out very soon.

www.strobecircus.com

GEAR

Bass Fender Deluxe Jazz, Warwick Corvette
Effects Moog 105B Bass Murf, Line6 M5 Modeller
Amp Markbass Little Mark 250, Ashdown 2x10T Deep Cab

SANDY BEALES

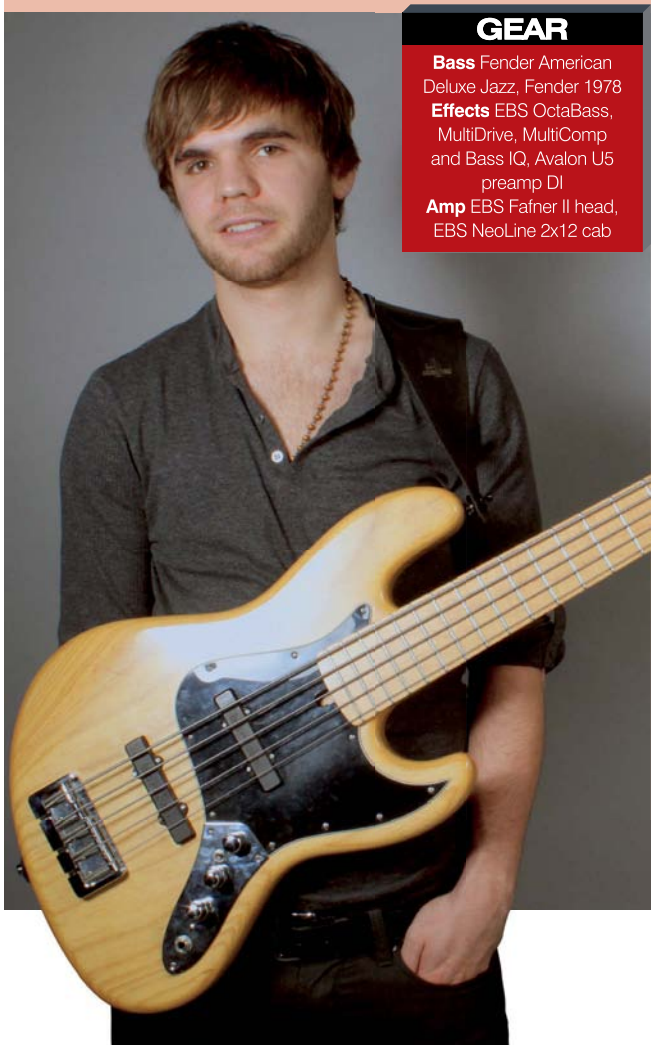
One Direction

The secret of playing bass well is being solid and reliable. If you turn up prepared and play the tunes, everyone will be happy. For two years I said yes to every gig or performance I was offered, which led to work with a vast amount of singers and musicians across many genres, and ultimately led to the audition for One Direction. Working with the boys has taken me to some crazy places. The TV shows we have done in America have been real career highlights, and we're going back to New York in December to perform at Madison Square Garden, which is a dream come true.

My main bass hero is Jamerson. His creativity, groove and feel are second to none. I feel he paved the way for a lot of bass players to be more creative and melodic. As far as others go, I would have to say Andrew Gouche, Janek Gwizdala, Pino Palladino and Nathan East. I've personally been lucky enough to get advice and inspiration from Stuart Clayton, Phil Mulford and Laurence Cottle.

My first bass was a beautiful little Encore P-bass, it got stolen a few years ago though. I'm gutted, as I'd like to still have it. My favourite bass to date is still my vintage Jazz. It weighs a tonne and looks like it's been through a blender, but still sounds amazing. I recently picked up a '57 reissue P-bass and have been really impressed with its huge full tone. It sounds great palm-muted as well. I occasionally play a five-string for certain gigs, but mainly just stick to four. I've yet to venture anywhere near a six though. I don't ever really slap, not that I have anything against it particularly. I like it when it's used subtly, such as Marcus Miller's playing on Luther Vandross' track 'Never Too Much'. But in general I think slapping can be a bit overkill.

www.sandybeales.com



GEAR

Bass Fender American Deluxe Jazz, Fender 1978
Effects EBS OctaBass, MultiDrive, MultiComp and Bass IQ, Avalon U5 preamp DI
Amp EBS Fafner II head, EBS NeoLine 2x12 cab

DARREN PHILIP DODDS

Red Jester

Both my technique and my gear are strongly influenced by two of the most recognisable voices in the bass-playing community: Jaco Pastorius and Billy Sheehan. The techniques I have stolen and adapted from these players include the use of harmonics, three-finger right-hand picking and two-hand tapping. Gear-wise, my choice of bass is the American Deluxe Fender Jazz, which I have customised with Simms LEDs, a Hipshot D Tuner, and a Leo Quan Badass III bridge. My choice of amp is the Ampeg 4 Pro series that I combine with various classic Ampeg cabs: 1x15, 2x10, 6x10 and 8x10, depending on the needs of the gig.

After gaining a music degree, and being taught by UK bass virtuoso Fred Baker, I have travelled far and wide, playing in a vast array of musical styles and situations. As well as my freelance work, I am currently involved with my originals band Red Jester, a lively and energetic four-piece rock act. Our first album is a self-financed effort that should be released late in 2012. I think it's important to have an easy-going attitude, practise hard, be as versatile as possible, and enjoy whatever you're doing in the crazy world of bass.

www.darrenphilipdodds.co.uk

GEAR

Bass Fender American Deluxe Jazz
Effects Boss ME-50B
Amp Ampeg 4 Pro series, Ampeg cabs

OWEN STREET

Prosperina

When called for, I can be very aggressive. I love the way a bass sounds when you really go for it; the harmonics produced from hitting the fretboard hard with your right hand can really sing with a little distortion. Other times it's just great to sit back and groove. I do not play five- or six-string basses, as they confuse the hell out of me! When there's loads going on you need gear that you trust and know inside out – so it's four strings all the way. My bass is tuned low enough for the earth-shakers anyway.

The secret of playing bass well is putting an armchair inside the kick drum, laying back, and playing games with the drummer's timing. Simple things like playing ahead of his beat can really drive a riff. My first bass was a Hondo 2, a P-style with a banana-shaped neck and maple fretboard. My favourite bass ever is my Rickenbacker 4001; it's been all around the world with me and suffered hard. A lot of tape, blood and sweat have now become part of the wood. I love it: nothing sounds better, or fits me so well.

My bass heroes are James Jamerson, Melvin Dunlap, Larry Graham, and Billy Cox. Justin Chancellor, Dave Edwardson and Al Cisneros have educated me a lot at the heavier end of the spectrum, and Geezer Butler is the man. But the greatest bass player that ever lived was Cliff Burton. Listening to '(Anesthesia) Pulling Teeth' inspired me to play bass. I was going to go for lead guitar, but there was little need to after hearing what Cliff could do. As a kid, his knowledge of Bach really blew me away.

www.prosperina.co.uk

GEAR

Bass Rickenbacker 4001
Effects Korg DT-10, Boss ODM-3, BMF Effects Aries Fuzz, Electro Harmonix POG 2, Jim Dunlop 105Q Wah, Roland RE-20
Amp Matamp GT200, Ampeg SVT, Orange AD200, Selmer PA 100, HH Bass Machine, Ampeg 8x10 cab, Trace Elliot 1248H cab

JON SYKES
The Pineapple Thief

I've been playing a five-string more recently because a lot of our songs need a low D. I find a decent five delivers this a lot better than a flappy, detuned bottom string on a four. It's pretty ridiculous that people want to judge a player based on the number of strings on their instrument, or a style they employ. Just play what the song needs, and play the instrument you want to play. Maybe it's harder to find an extended range instrument that looks 'rock', but do it if you want and sod other people's preconceptions.

I used to slap in other bands, but I don't at the moment because the songs don't need it. I'd be sticking in those Seinfeld licks if they were required – after a bit of time in the shed to get them into shape again.

Pay your dues in the shed, learn as much as you can from other players, and then when you are with the band just listen to the other musicians, and adjust your playing to serve the song and the sound. My first bass was a Marlin Slammer that my mum bought me when I was 15. The bass I miss most is a Status Series 1 through-neck, ash-bodied four-string that was stolen 12 years ago. Like an old girlfriend, you know you didn't necessarily get on, but you can't help wondering who they are with and what they are doing.

From the point of view of playing for the song, I've always loved Macca and Sting. I'm a fan of Flea and Rocco Prestia; Esperanza Spalding is spectacular, and Reid Anderson of The Bad Plus is phenomenal, too. Ray Brown and Willie Dixon are absolute legends. There are just too many to name. Picking the best is impossible, but if you push me I'll say Jaco for his impact on the image of the bass guitar, and how it can be played. There is never enough time to practise. Realise this before it's too late.

www.pineapplethief.com

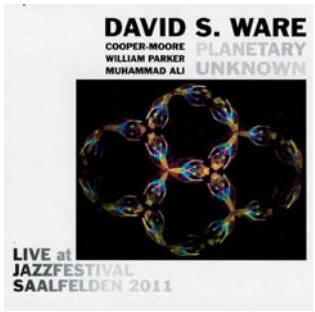
GEAR

Bass Kramer Stagemaster, Fender Jazz, Gibson SG, Cort GB5 Custom, Aria Custom SWB-4 EUB
Effects Crowther Prunes And Custard, Big Muff
Amp Genz Benz Shuttle 6.0 Eden 2x10 and 1x12 cabs

IN THE GROOVE

Music and books from Planet Bass, reviewed by Mike Flynn, Ben Cooper and Spencer Grady

RECORDS



David S Ware/ Planetary Unknown
Live At Jazzfestival Saalfelden 2011

Music ★★★ Playing ★★★★

Every great jazz quartet has its core. Coltrane had Jimmy Garrison; Coleman had Charlie Hayden. When David Ware assembled his second classic unit at the end of 2010, the only remaining survivor from his previous long-standing foursome was bassist William Parker. This live album documents Ware's fiery visions, and the nimble dexterity of his most trusted sideman. One of Parker's great skills is knowing the right time to chase the channels. For much of the lengthy 'Precessional 1', his frenetic runs are subjugated by the more direct excursions of his fellow players. Only during a brief intermission does he emerge from the tumult, coaxing whispered pitch bends over the delicate phrasings of Cooper-Moore's piano. Parker also gets a chance to shine on the smouldering 'Precessional 3', where he plays granular, sometimes discordant, bowed bass in funereal accompaniment to Ware's most lyrical blasts. Planetary Unknown strive for an abolition of ego. Real focus is required to decipher Parker's poised craft amid the egalitarian hullaballoo, but clouds part and signposts are marked. Seeking out the points of clarity rewards the effort and re-energises the listener, like a refreshment pit stop along an exhausting marathon trail. **[SG]**

Down
Down IV Part 1: The Purple EP

Music ★★★ Playing ★★★★

You can't fault Phil Anselmo on the productivity front. Since Pantera disbanded he's been incredibly prolific, and Down has been his best project. This EP is the first in a series of four planned for release over the next year, and its six tracks deliver exactly what you'd expect: muscular metal that fuses Anselmo's trademark groove rock with elements of his more esoteric side projects. Patrick Bruders takes up the bass chair from Rex Brown, and handles it with aplomb, punching out crushing riffs with a thick, distorted tone. The bass playing is not technical as such, but it's good – the tight riffage has that groovy edge we've come to expect from Down. On 'Open Coffins', there are some nice fills as Bruders moves away from the kick-drum locked grooves of the two opening tracks, but most of the time he's doubling riffs and punctuating the huge drum grooves of Jimmy Bower, which is just what this kind of music needs. It's a strong effort and should satisfy fans before the next release. **[BC]**

José James
No Beginning No End

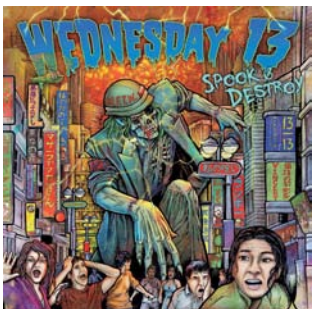
Music ★★★★ Playing ★★★★

Soul-jazz singer José James has steadily been building a reputation as the rightful heir to Donny Hathaway or Isaac Hayes. Now he's ready to move beyond the confines of the jazz singer label, and his debut for legendary jazz label Blue Note dives into 1970s Gil Scott-Heron-meets-D'Angelo territory, with a definite soul/world-music accent. Fuelling this funk-edged set are several cuts with bass legend Pino Palladino, who provides some brilliant behind-the-beat grooves. From the opening 'It's All Over Your Body' to the radio-friendly 'Come To My Door', James is clearly enjoying this new hook-laden format, though some may take issue with his more constrained approach to singing. The tight soul/R&B and hip-hop tinged backing clips the wings of some of his vocal invention. That said, *No Beginning No End* should reach out beyond the jazz world. James is a talent deserving of a much greater recognition (and album sales), and when he reminds us of his vocal power on 'Do You Feel Right', he truly takes flight. **[MF]**

Roni Ben-Hur/ Santi Debriano
Our Thing

Music ★★★ Playing ★★★★

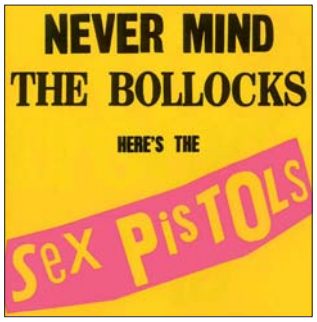
It's a cliché to state that jazz, in its purest form, is akin to a conversation between musicians, but this really is the case on the softly alluring new album from double bassist Santi Debriano and bebop guitarist Roni Ben-Hur. The music sounds like two old friends laughing, joking and debating life over a fine bottle of wine – such is their flow – and the set is pushed along with gentle authority by Brazilian drummer/ percussionist Duduka Da Fonseca. This sunny session of seven originals and four jazz/Latin standards arose from the bassist and guitarist's jazz summer camp, held each year at a 12th century church atop the village of Saint Cezaire in France – the duo always perform a closing concert at the summer school. Their effortless interplay helps capture not only the idyllic location of their concert, but also the melting pot of styles contributed by each member's personality. Debriano's warm, woody tone has the kind of oak-like strength once possessed by late great Cuban bassist Orlando 'Cachaito' Lopez, combined with the dexterity of a NYC session veteran. This is a beautifully understated set from three masters in full flight. **[MF]**



Wednesday 13
Spook And Destroy

Music ★★★★ Playing ★★★

If you don't like swearing, you'd best bypass Wednesday 13's latest. If, however, you like your metal mutha****ing rude, then the opening track on this EP, 'M.F.T.W' could be right up your street. Lyrics aside, the track sounds somewhat bizarrely like something Skid Row might have cut for *Slave To The Grind*, and that's intended as a compliment of the highest order. Wednesday's vocals are a bit grimier than Sebastian Bach's, for sure, but the riffing and squealing guitar solos are some of the best balls-out rock I've heard in a while. 'Halloween 13-13', the only other new song on this eight-track EP, is Alice Cooper-esque in its overall tone and feel, but retains the kind of horror-punk edge that is Wednesday's stock-in-trade. The other tracks are re-recordings, remixes or acoustic versions of existing material. Bass-wise it's functional driving rock playing on both tracks, and if you can get past the overtly cartoon-horror imagery then this EP is worth a spin. **[BC]**



Sex Pistols
Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols

Music ★★★★ Playing ★★★

Whether or not you're into punk, the impact of the bands that exploded onto the musical scene in the late 70s is hard to ignore. Despite what certain music critics would have you believe, punk didn't kill prog-rock and its ilk in 1977, but it did reshape the musical landscape, keying into the discontent and general social malaise of the times. Perhaps the most important record in British punk music was *Never Mind The Bollocks,* with its socially charged lyrics and aggressive riffs. This re-release features the original album in remastered form, as well as several live concerts and a DVD. Listening to the album now, it retains all of its energy and purpose; in fact, the anger and venom directed at the Britain of the time seems more appropriate now than in the intervening years. The live recordings are interesting, though the quality isn't great from a sonic perspective, particularly the vocals. Sid Vicious had replaced Glen Matlock on bass at this point and diligently pumps out eighth note roots as best he can. For fans of the band, and punk in general, this set will be a must-have. **[BC]**

Tribal Tech
X

Music ★★★★ Playing ★★★★★

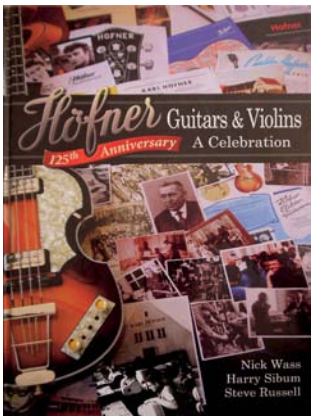
It's a sign of the times that guitarist Scott Henderson, bassist Gary Willis and keyboardist Scott Kinsey are generally referred to as bandleaders in their own right. *X* marks the return of their epoch-defining quartet, Tribal Tech – the band that first established their fearsome blend of ultra-heavy rock-edged fusion. The aptly titled LP is their tenth studio date together, and signposts a decade-long break since *Rocket Science*. There's been little change to their characteristically caustic mix of dense harmonic and melodic ideas, but the rest period has seemingly rejuvenated them. The album's least adventurous track, 'Mech X', kicks things off, with Henderson's trademark call-of-the-wild guitar squeals ushering in a bone-crushing riff. Drummer Kirk Covington is on fiery form throughout, but Willis's monstrous fretless work forms the core of this album. His tone ranges from thick, thudding funk punches to the velvety lyricism of standout tune 'Anthem'. On the latter he darts from a plaintive melody to a truly sublime solo that wraps up sweet phrases and artful chops to perfection. When he hits the low end, Willis provides a masterclass in dynamics and hard-grooving support throughout. After over 25 years of playing together, age has done nothing but sharpen this compelling group's instincts. This is surely their strongest album yet. Here's to the next 10 years. **[MF]**

Incite
All Out War

Music ★★★★ Playing ★★★

This second album from thrashers Incite continues the trend that they set with their debut album *The Slaughter*: good old-fashioned thrash metal with a modern edge. What's so refreshing about this album, from a musical perspective, is its relentless nature. There's little in the way of genre fusing. Instead, the band kick out high-speed riffs, double kick-drum blastbeats and screamed vocals like they're going out of style. In this style of metal there is little room for a bass player to move, let alone catch his breath, so Luis Marrufo does what most of us would choose to do: he keeps it simple and tight. Thrash doesn't tend to favour the bass, seeing it more as another guitar but pitched lower, and the mix here is so tight and thick that the bass rarely stands out from the wall of sonic assault. This is a breathtaking sophomore effort from Richie Cavalera and his crew, and should put to bed any ridiculous notions that he's only got to where he is because of his legendary stepfather. Incite are very much their own band, and if you're into the heavier end of heavy metal, you must listen to this album. **[BC]**

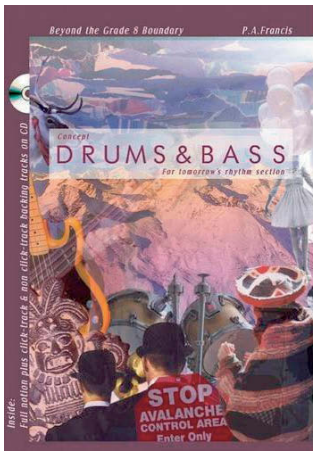
BOOKS



Höfner Guitars And Violins: A Celebration
Nick Hass, Harry Sibum, Steve Russell

Rating ★★★★

Höfner guitars conjure up images of a youthful Paul McCartney playing his violin bass 500/1. So strong is the Beatles association that this extensive hardbacked tome includes an entire chapter devoted to the Liverpudlians. It includes a page on Macca and his iconic bass, as well as information on the 500/5 used by the late Stuart Sutcliffe, and the Höfner guitars favoured by Harrison and Lennon. The book doesn't trade heavily on the connection to the Fab Four, though. Instead, it offers an intimate history of Höfner, from its inception in 1887 by violin maker Karl Höfner, through to the present day. Interestingly, the book includes huge numbers of archive pictures, plus shots of the Höfner team at work and play. There are also plans of instruments, and the expected glamour shots of some of their finest. The book puts a human face to the company – something often missing in today's mass production corporate world. Given that Höfner make many instruments other than basses, not everything in the book is bass-centric. However, for any musician, this is an intriguing title to dip into. It's picture-heavy, so not something that requires a deal of concentration. It will be of interest to any musician with a sense of history. **[BC]**



Drums and Bass – For Tomorrow's Rhythm Section
Paul A Francis

Rating ★★★

This book from Paul Francis is a collection of performance pieces aimed at bassists of Grade 8 level and above. Francis has performed, written and recorded with a diverse range of artists – from Paul McCartney and Amy Winehouse to BB King – so he's no dusty academic churning out another textbook. In fact, if you're looking for lessons here then you're in for a letdown, as the book is less about teaching new tricks, and more about offering some challenging performance pieces to get your teeth into. Each track has both notation and tablature, as well as a drum score and backing tracks, provided on two CDs. The songs are contemporary in nature, mixing funk, fusion, Latin and Afro elements to ensure that your sense of groove gets as good a workout as your hands. There are plenty of challenging passages and different time signatures to keep you on your toes. As well as focusing on the groove, the tunes encourage stylistic interpretation and improvisation, both skills that the budding professional player needs to hone. If you're looking to learn the ins and outs of various musical styles, though, this book isn't for you. Paul Francis assumes that you have a certain level of skill and musical theory behind you, and these performance pieces are designed to flex your musical chops. **[BC]**

TAKE FIVE

Every month a bassist reveals five albums that changed their world

Ian Hill, Judas Priest

The mighty Judas Priest have just reissued their 1982 album *Screaming For Vengeance*, a titanic slab of heavy metal if ever we heard one. Here we ask bassist Ian Hill (who has been in Priest since 1970, pop pickers) to name five albums that helped him along the righteous path to metal glory, and left an indelible impression on his musical brain.

John Mayall with Eric Clapton

Blues Breakers (1966)

This was the pinnacle of British blues in my opinion: John Mayall was such a huge figure when it came to that music. Of course, the bass was played by John McVie, one of the all-time classic British blues bassists. He's so underrated and yet he's played in so many bands, including Fleetwood Mac, of course. I think John is overlooked as a bass player, for some reason, perhaps because all of the great musicians in Fleetwood Mac like Peter Greene and Mick Fleetwood.

The Beatles

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967)

Good old *Sgt. Pepper*. Any musician of my age who says he wasn't influenced by this album is a liar. It all comes together on this LP and it's such high-quality pop music. McCartney is great on it. There are barely any solos, it's all about the songwriting, and McCartney was fantastic both as a bassist and a writer. It epitomised the music of its era. Everything that came after it looked back to it, somehow. Mind you, I tried one of those Höfner violin basses once and I thought it was crap.

Cream

Wheels Of Fire (1968)

Jack Bruce is my all-time idol. He went through John Mayall's band too, of course, as did Eric Clapton. What those two did in Cream with Ginger Baker was just amazing. If there was one album that I had to take with me to a desert island, this would probably be it. It's an absolute peach, and they were so young when they did it. Listening to it you'd think they'd been playing together for 30 or 40 years, but no, they'd just started. This LP sounds as fresh today as it did 30 years ago.

Quatermass

Quatermass (1970)

Johnny Gustafson was on bass and vocals on this album, and just as a vocalist he was great, let alone his bass playing, which was superb. He was one of the Liverpool musicians from the 60s, I think, and he did some work with Roxy Music as well. Neither he nor Quatermass ever got the attention they deserved, which was a shame because they were a great band. In Judas Priest's early days, when we had Al Atkins on vocals, we used to do a few Quatermass numbers.

Weather Report

Heavy Weather (1977)

Roger Glover of Deep Purple first played me this album when we were with him in the studio. Jaco Pastorius was a breath of fresh air. You absolutely knew when you heard it that he was an amazing player. It was such an awful waste, what happened to him. I know I play heavy metal but I've always loved jazz. My dad was a jazz double bassist and he used to play it to me all the time. It's a great form of music if you want to express yourself as a musician.

TODAY'S LESSON:
ARTISTS PLAYING AGUILAR
Adam Clayton U2
Ethan Farmer NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK
Chris Wyrsch Imagine Mythology
Ben Sargeant The Script
Freddie Washington STEELY DAN
JEPH HOWARD The Used
Chris Chaney Jane's Addiction
Eric Smith Rihanna
Matt Rubano All American Rejects
RON JOHNSON Warren Haynes
Sharee D'Angelo ARCH ENEMY
Brandon Brown THE JACKSONS
Artie Reynolds American Idol
Ben Allison Ben Allison Band
Ruben Rodriguez VITO PUENTO
2+3 = ?
Jimmy Sims MIKA
Joe Karnes Fitz and the Tantrums
Svetlana Vassileva MOBY
Anthony Wellington THE VICTOR WOOTEN BAND
DERRICK HODGE The Robert Glasper Experiment
Edwin Carranza Kenny Lattimore
Gary Willis Slaughterhouse 3
Felix Pastorius Yellowjackets
Bill Dukes THE METERS EXPERIENCE
Paul Turner Jamiroquai
ADAM NITTI Steven Curtis Chapman
Chris Donohue EMMYLOU HARRIS
Jesse Stern JORDIN SPARKS
DAMIAN ERSKINE Peter Erskine Trio
John Patitucci Chick Corea
Matt Nowesky BLUE OCTOBER
Matt Sweeney Michael W. Smith
Wade Query THE DECEMBERISTS
Tony Grey John McLaughlin
Ricky Minor The Tonight Show Band
Thomas Dryden CHILDISH GAMBINO
Justin Meldal-Johnson BECK, NIN
Dave Swift Alter with Josh Holland
Oskar Cartaya Cartaya's Enclave
Pete Cherry GRAFFITI 6
Bryant Scott JENNIFER LOPEZ
Dalton Wecker PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Vivi Rama WILL.I.AM
Yolanda Charles SINEAD O'CONNOR
Todd Johnson RON ESCHETE
Stu Brooks Matisyahu
Benny Reitveld SANTANA
George Porter Jr. THE METERS
Nathan Peck Alex Skolnick Band
Josh Moreau KATY PERRY
Guest Variety JOEZ AWMUL
aguilar
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Pics © Tina Korhonen

KINGDOM THUMB

Level 42's Mark King is more than just a bass-playing icon. He's one of a kind. Paul Geary meets the man behind the Status…

"Over the years," muses Mark King, "when parents have asked me about their kids wanting to play an instrument, I always say buy the best one you can afford. If it doesn't work out, and you flog it, you get your money back. A good instrument is also much easier to play and sounds good. If you start off with a clunker that's impossible to play, the kid will get disheartened, and you'll have wasted your money. For me, it's just good insurance. You either spend £50 and waste the £50, or spend £150 and you'll get £130 back."

Such wisdom sums up the world-view that King and Level 42 have developed over the 33 years since their formation. The frontman's percussive slap-bass, often delivered at eye-wateringly high speed, was one of many factors that propelled the band to international stardom as one of the 1980s' best-known jazz-pop-funk outfits. His fame as a bassist makes it all the more interesting that King started his career as a drummer.

"I started dancing when I was five," he chuckles. "I won a twist competition at Camp Hill Prison Officers' Club [on the Isle Of Wight, King's birthplace]. The prize was a packet of Rolos, which was great, and a paper drum kit. I fell in love with the paper drum kit. It had cardboard shells with paper skins and the snare had a little spring on the bottom of it. I used to bash around on this with a pair of drumsticks. Of course, the kit lasted about five minutes, but I had fallen in love with drums.

"So, from the age of five," he continues, "I was banging anything I could – not chicks obviously, I was five – but banging things with sticks. When I got to nine, I overheard some guys saying there was a drum kit for sale in my local town, Newport, on the Isle of Wight. After school I travelled about 10 miles there and back to find this drum kit and they were asking £10 for it, which was a lot of money back in 1968."

Level 42 began as all the best bands do, as a bunch of kids having a jam. "It was a band of four mates getting together, talking about music, thinking about what we were going to do, and how great it was going to be. I met Boon Gould and Phil Gould, the guitarist and drummer, when I was about 15. I grew up with them on the Isle of Wight. I was drumming and Phil and I would get together and talk about Billy Cobham, Tony Williams, Lenny White – these were the guys who were really doing it for us, the fusion players from America."

Asked about his early influences, King explains: "When I was 14 and my mum and dad had just bought a new TV, I didn't know how to turn it off so I inadvertently switched over and hit upon this guy stood there with a twin-necked guitar, dressed in white with short hair – this was in 1972 – and a guy behind the drums that looked like they were made of glass. One dude was sat behind this keyboard. I'd never seen anything like it before. I didn't realise it was just a Fender Rhodes with the top taken off, but it looked amazing. They had a violinist in the band, Jerry Goodman. It was the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and that was an epiphany for me.

> "SO, FROM THE AGE OF FIVE I WAS BANGING ANYTHING I COULD – NOT CHICKS OBVIOUSLY, I WAS FIVE – BUT BANGING THINGS WITH STICKS"

"I had loved Cream since I was eight years old, then Jimi Hendrix of course. I was getting into Buddy Rich, but I just saw this and it changed everything for me. Suddenly it unlocked something in my head that I'd been looking for harmonically, and wanted to hear. It was so off-the-wall. It came at such a good time, because at the age of 14, you're looking to an alternative to what your parents like. Spiritually you're trying to find yourself, and there's nothing more spiritual than music.

"Wind forward to around 19 years of age," he continues, "and we were all living in London, hanging out together because we didn't know anyone else. We had come from an island where you did know

Universal Records, 20 July 2012: a masterclass promoting the 25th anniversary reissue of Level 42's *Running In The Family*

everybody, but London is a much bigger metropolis and you feel like a really small fish. The Isle of Wight was a great place for the three of us to grow up, because there was lots of work – all these holiday camps, bars and pubs offering tons of live gigs."

King isn't the first musician to stress the value of live gigs as a musical education, but he's one of the most inspired. He tells us: "As I always say to any aspiring student, just play as much as you can with as many people as you can. You may not always like the songs or the music – if you go from playing 'The Gay Gordons' to a swinging little quickstep, to a Stevie Wonder track, to doing 'River Deep, Mountain High', to a Beatles song, to a waltz, half the time you're thinking 'I can't stand this stuff', but what's happening is you're exponentially broadening your horizons. You become such a well-rounded player. Growing up we'd listen to sax and trumpet players coming down to the holiday camps, who'd sit there and regale us with stories about how scary it is in London, about how they'd be walking down Shaftesbury Avenue and see Phil Seaman, one of the great jazz drummers. We thought London must be knee-deep in amazing players, but I was pleasantly surprised, when I got there, that it wasn't. Like anywhere else, you can go there and make your mark."

So how did King make the switch to bass? He tells the tale: "I'd done a couple of things you do as a struggling musician. I joined bands overseas, one in Italy and one in Austria, and it was during the Austria trip that I lost my drums, my record collection and my clothes. It was one of those rock'n'roll horror stories. It didn't work out and I ended up coming back with nothing. But I was hanging out with my mates again and now Phil had drums, so the lucky swine was drumming in the band. I got a job in a music store just to get by. They didn't sell drums, but I told a bit of a fib and said I played bass, and that was it.

"I didn't really want to play bass," he continues, "it was forced on me. We thought this little band we were just having fun with would do until our ship came in, which would be some amazing band from America. I was playing bass, but I didn't really give a toss about it, and I didn't really think about laying some proper bass-lines down. I just started slapping around – like drumming on the bass."

Things moved fast for Level 42. Once King had begun to hone his style, success came calling, he remembers. "Ironically, the first single we ever recorded, by Andy Sojka on Elite Records, was called 'Love Meeting Love', which had quite an arpeggiated bass-line, all finger-style, no slap at all. It was this long, meandering thing. Andy, the producer, said he'd record it if we came up with a melody line and found a singer. We saw a chance to get something out. I didn't like the idea of someone else coming in, so I thought I'd have a crack at it. I came up with the melody and Boon and I just sat there one night and he mashed out the lyrics. That was how our songwriting partnership started, which continues to this day, 35 years later."

"IRONICALLY, THE FIRST SINGLE WE EVER RECORDED, BY ANDY SOJKA ON ELITE RECORDS, WAS CALLED 'LOVE MEETING LOVE', WHICH HAD QUITE AN ARPEGGIATED BASS-LINE, ALL FINGER-STYLE, NO SLAP AT ALL"

When it comes to bass guitars, King has played some beauties in his time. "When I got my £500 share of the advance money to go and get a bass with, I was going to try and find a Wal, because everyone had said how great they were. It just happened that, at that time, they were experimenting with graphite in the neck – but the graphite and wood combination didn't work, they all ended up bending. I couldn't find one that I thought was any good, but then it just happened that in the corner of the shop

Pics © Tina Korhonen

“Status said, ‘Mark, how come nobody has helped you design your own bass?’ We had a couple of bottles of wine and I said, ‘Why do basses have to be so big? Can’t we have something that’s really small and sexy?’”

Pics © Tina Korhonen

was this JD Supernatural. It looked like an Alembic, which I'd seen Stanley Clarke play. I loved it, and it became synonymous with Level 42. Then Rob Green [of Status Graphite] came along, and I was using Status basses, then we went on tour with Steve Winwood and the Alembic guys came along and did a couple of signature models and they were beautiful. I stayed with the Alembics for 10 years or so until I knocked the band on the head in around 1994."

Times changed, and so did King's bass of choice, he tells us. "I had a couple of years not doing anything, then, when I came back, Fender got in touch and said they wanted to do a Jazz Deluxe signature model. The one thing I liked about the Alembics was the really flat fingerboard. I don't really like a cambered neck. So they incorporated all this into this Jazz Deluxe for me, and the poncy lights as well [on the fretboard] so I used those for a bit."

Enter Status Graphite once again. "Rob Green asked me why nobody had sat down with me and helped me design my own bass. So we had a couple of bottles of wine and I said, 'Why do basses have to be so big? Can't we have something that's really small and sexy?' I quite liked the headless design, with the tuning at the bridge, but you couldn't bend the notes. Rob said, 'Well, why don't we move the actual nut back and put the zero fret up here?' which was great because we gave ourselves the Bendwell [string-bending system]. The shape of the bass was really nice and I used those for about six years. Then I hit middle age, started eating and put on about four stone. I suddenly realised that these little basses were making me look even chubbier than I really was, so I asked Rob to make me a bass that looked thinner. He made a much bigger-bodied bass – and, sure enough, it worked."

See elsewhere in this issue for a review of King's latest signature Status. But how about Mark's amps? He's been with Trace Elliot and Ashdown, and he's with TC Electronic these days. "It would seem like I'm a bit of a tart when it comes to gear," he laughs, "but I'm not really. I've been going 30-odd years now and when I began, because of the sound I was looking for, I had a Marshall 8x10 guitar cab with a Roland JC-200 amp head on top, because I liked the chorus in it. That was the first amp; we toured that for a year, then by the time I got to 1981, Trace Elliot came on the scene. On the way to a gig at Zero 6 in Essex, we stopped off on the way out there to have a look at an all-in-one 8x10 with a GP11 graphic, as it was then. It sounded great and I asked if they'd sponsor me. They said, 'No, we don't sponsor anybody, young man'. So I told them to come to the gig that night. They did, and afterwards they said I could keep the rig. I went on to have a hand-in-hand thing with Trace Elliot. Later, Mesa Boogie threw me a load of gear, but I never really got into that stuff, because the valve thing really wasn't working for me. It was a bit fuzzy, a bit warm."

He continues: "Mark Gooday from Ashdown, a good old friend I'd known from the Trace Elliot days, brought along a load of stuff and asked what I was missing. I wanted the old Trace GP12 graphic thing. I asked him to give me my old 80s sound back. Of course he had all the old diagrams and everything, so they knocked out the Mark King head, which worked great for me. Then TC Electronic came along one day and told me to have a listen to their rig. They stood it up next to the other one and I couldn't believe what I was missing."

> "AT THE AGE OF 14, YOU WANT TO SAY 'SORRY MUM AND DAD, YOUR MUSIC SUCKS'. SPIRITUALLY YOU'RE TRYING TO FIND YOURSELF, AND THERE'S NOTHING MORE SPIRITUAL THAN MUSIC"

After all these years, Level 42 are going as strongly as ever, both live and on record. There's a 25th anniversary box set of *Running In The Family* on its way (see the News section to win one) and dates aplenty lined up. "It's our 25th anniversary," ruminates King. "We've got a tour coming up at the end of this year, and when you're touring there's always some anniversary or something. Actually, this year is the 50th anniversary of my fourth birthday. Work that one out, you'll figure out how old I am!"

As we wind up our interview, has King got any advice for bass players? You bet he has. "You've just got to love it more than anything else," he says, "because that will get you through all of the crap times which I can guarantee you are ahead. You need total self-belief." Take it from a man who knows.

Level 42's Running In The Family *box set is out now. Info: www.level42.com.*

Mark King plus keen students (from left): Universal Records consultant Daryl Easlea plus *BGM* scribes Dave Marks and Lieutenant Dave Clarke

HANGING WITH THE KING

BGM regular Dave Marks got the chance to sit down with Mark King for a face-to-face lesson in slap bass. Jealous? You will be…

It's not every day that a musician has the chance to sit down with one of the true masters of an instrument and basically poke around inside their head. However, at the launch of the new Level 42 box set, my chance came in the shape of a lesson with none other than Britfunk legend Mark King.

Mark was in London filming a set of acoustic numbers in Universal's secret studio facility and, alongside this, three lucky bassists were allowed to sit with him, watch him play (and sing!) and quiz him on how he approaches the instrument. First up, Mark ripped through 'Running In The Family'. This track features a combination of punchy rhythmic unison work, dynamic fingerstyle lines and a selection of trademark King-isms such as quick-fire triplets, left-hand slaps and lightning-fast pull-offs. After such an impressive display, we jumped straight in with the questions…

You have a stunning technical command of the bass guitar, Mark. Do you have a top tip for developing as a bassist?
Tap your foot. Everything that we do happens in time, and you're either in time or out of time. If you're in time, you can play with other people, they can latch on to what you're doing and you can make music.

If you're out of time, it doesn't really matter what notes you play or how fast you are, it won't sound right. I notice, with a lot of young players and students, that they don't tap their foot. They don't move with the music that they play – and the notes sort of wander around. It doesn't feel grounded or locked in.

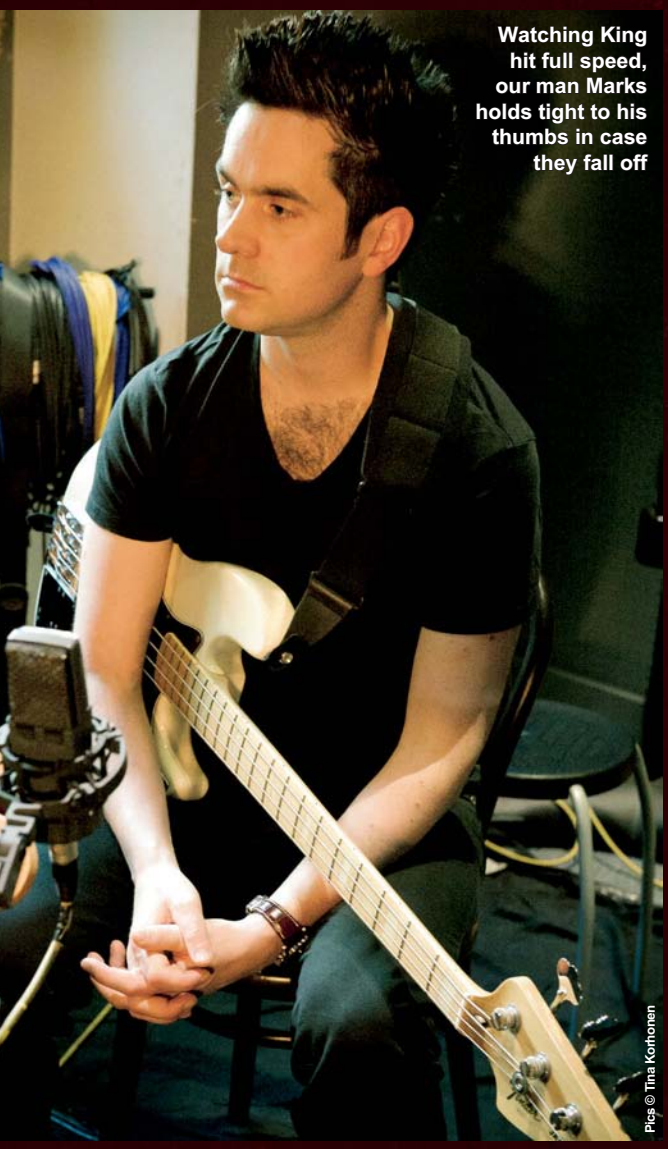
I notice that your bass-lines move from strictly rhythmic 'bass parts' into more melodic territory, where you sometimes outline the very top and bottom of the harmony. How did you develop that approach?
The tricky thing about singing and playing bass is that, on some gigs, the sound is going to be terrible. It's just a mush. Because the lines I'm playing are so low down, when the sound is bad, you could be almost a semitone out with the vocal and not even realise!

I love the sound of the bass and vocal coming together like this, and it also helps a lot, because it gives me something much clearer to pitch to. I use two-note parts like these [plays a funky bass-line complete with sliding popped tenths]. You see them popping up in lots of our tunes; it's just a thing that I do. I suppose it's part of my playing style now.

Mark then ripped through a raucous version of 'To Be With You Again', complete with a range of tight slap and pop work, as well as some deft fingerstyle.

The bass-lines seem to have additions – new musical ideas that weren't on the original recordings

Yeah – we put little things in. When you're on the road, touring a set, you need to do little things to keep it interesting. The songs evolve in little ways and each time a new member joins, they usually learn the set from a recording of the last tour, so they inherit the last guy's parts. Sometimes it's to add a bit more to the groove, sometimes it's little hits to frame up the vocal, and sometimes it's just a burst of notes to add some excitement. If you listen to the vanilla versions and the way we play them now, most of the songs have just developed over the years as we've played them more.



Watching King hit full speed, our man Marks holds tight to his thumbs in case they fall off

Pics © Tina Korhonen

Most players would find your bass-lines very challenging to play. You play them and sing lead vocals over the top. How did you develop that ability?

I think singing's really important, and everyone has a voice. Some people work more on theirs, or would consider themselves a 'singer', but everyone's got a voice. It's important not to be shy or afraid to use it. I did a gig at Ronnie Scott's a while back and tried to get everyone in the band singing. Playing and singing at once is hard to do, but I think everyone is capable of doing it. You just have to put your head down and work on it. It probably helped that I started off playing bass and singing at the same time. Originally, I'd wanted to be a drummer, but I became a bass player by default. Level 42 was just a thing we did jamming on Monday nights at Mike Lindup's college. Phil Gould was a great drummer and had a particular swing to how he played, so it just made more sense for me to play the bass.

When we were writing tunes and recording in the studio, I didn't have to track both at the same time. I had the luxury of recording all my bass parts, then going in and laying down vocals over each track and I could really explore and get great performances on them. The problem was, we'd get into the rehearsal room, with a week to rehearse and then we're off on tour – and I'd suddenly realise I had to do both these things at once! So I'd get into the vibe of the band playing and just try to pull the parts together.

The problem is, some of the vocal parts move with the bass-line, but some move with the guitar and some are just completely in their own place. I just have to try and resist the urge to make the vocal follow what I'm playing on the bass. By now, it's instinctive: it's the kind of thing that I can't think too much about. If you think about it too much – bang! – you lose it. You need to start out with simple parts and just work at making it feel like a natural part of how you make music.

We rounded off this set of show-and-tell tunes with the Level 42 classic 'Lessons In Love'.

Could you break that bassline apart a bit?

It's basically just me moving through the arpeggios. The chord sequence and the tune of this song started out from a jam [plays through a simple one-note-per-bar version of the chord progression]. When the time came to write, we needed to present a single ahead of the release of the album. We put three songs forward, and 'Lessons In Love' was the 'orphan' song – the one among the three that got picked out for release. I showed the producer the part: just long bass notes with the vocal melody over it. We worked that rhythm in, started moving the line through the arpeggios, and he suggested that we flip some of the chords around, so that the progression went a bit differently. That's what ended up becoming the chorus.

'Lessons In Love' seems like one of your more straightforward bass-lines. Are there any aspects of it that you think are challenging for a bassist to learn?

'Lessons In Love' is a killer for stamina. Because it was a big hit, we play it toward the end of the set, so by the time I come to it, we've already been playing for hours. It's a pretty relentless part, so I've worked in a few skips – it's amazing, just an occasional hammer-on or a left hand slap can break it up and give you that second to get a bit of blood moving. The mechanics of it are less involved, but it's physically one of the hardest to play.

Even at this stage in my career, now that I've met most of my bass heroes, there's something fantastic about having an informal hang: four guys, four basses and a great vibe. Watching and listening to a player like Mark reminds me of my youth: of seeing pictures in magazines and reading interviews, of thinking that these guys were from another planet and that what they were doing was so far beyond me, I shouldn't even think about it.

Now, 20 years later, to sit down with a man who, with no pretence or arrogance, can openly show you all of things that made him the iconic player he is – it's quite an eye-opener. Mark King is himself in every note that he plays. He couldn't sound like someone else if he tried, and when people cop his licks they just sound like an imitation of him. He has built a style and sound that makes him instantly recognisable – a true artist. And man, can he play that bass…■

CAPTAIN HOOK

Raz Rauf meets Peter Hook, once of Joy Division and New Order, for a chat about his career as a bass icon

There are few bassists with a style as iconic as Peter Hook's. Think about the bass-lines that fly between the frantically rattled syncopations of Joy Division's timeless 'Love Will Tear Us Apart'. Consider how the clanging bass complements Bernard Sumner's vocals on New Order's dancefloor classic 'Blue Monday'. That's Peter Hook, with bass playing and writing credits on two of the most recognisable British songs ever.

"I remember very early on in Joy Division, Bernard said to me, 'Can't you just play the root note?' The answer was no," Hook laughs. "I suppose it's down to ego and having a style. Maybe I played it more like a lead instrument, more like a guitar, but you just have to be true to yourself. If you want to play the root note, play it like it's the best note in the world. I never subscribed to that way of playing bass, the bassist at the back pinning down the bass drum. A load of old bollocks."

Hook's bass philosophy is clearly vindicated by the roster of musicians that he's inspired. Sometime Jane's Addiction bassist Eric Avery cites Hook as his sole influence. Bassist Flea and guitarist Josh Klinghoffer, along with their former Red Hot Chili Peppers bandmate John Frusciante, formed a Joy Division tribute act in 2000.

"It's quite a compliment to be construed as an important bass player, and it's nice to have achieved a unique sound that people use for inspiration," Hook says, acknowledging the tributes, before becoming excited about an inspired fellow slightly closer to home. "My 22-year-old son plays the bass – he's very good, actually. He doesn't like the same music as me, but he can play in the same style, so it's uncanny. Sometimes, I look round when I'm playing the Joy Division stuff and I see me when I was 22. It's a bit freaky."

Hook wasn't always so comfortable in accepting his status as a bass legend. "I did go through periods," he continues, wincing slightly, "especially in the 80s and 90s, where, whenever someone said to me, 'As soon as you start playing I know it's you', I thought it was bad."

Ever the maverick, Hook's reservations came from not wanting to sound predictable. Having carved his own sonic niche, there was a brief period in which he tried something new. "I mention it in the book, actually. I went to learn slap bass, but I couldn't fucking do it," he laughs. "My mate, who's a great slap bass player, just said, 'Hooky, stick to what you're good at'. I did go through a phase, especially when I went into my solo career, when I went off the bass. Maybe I was trying to find myself, but that didn't last long, and by the time I got to Monaco, which was my second solo group, I was very happily playing it again. As my mother said, you need a gimmick, and I suppose you shouldn't knock it when you've got something unique. Now I'm very happy doing what I do. In his lighter moments, Bernard used to call me Mr Melody. I'm sure he wouldn't call me that now."

For the past few years, Peter Hook has been occupying himself with writing of a different kind. His latest book *Unknown Pleasures* is touted as 'the definitive story of Joy Division, told by the band's legendary bassist' and, judging by the huge success of his last book, *The Haçienda: How Not to Run a Club*, published by Foruli, Hook has absolutely no problem with re-telling tales of his past. But this new title is more than simply the next logical step in his new career as an author. You get the feeling that Hook is passionate about getting his name on this book and its contents.

"The last book I read about Joy Division was *Torn Apart: The Life Of Ian Curtis*, and there were so many things that I thought were wrong with it," he says. "I thought it was a bit rich, all these people writing about Joy Division when they weren't even there. I was very buoyed by the reception to the Haçienda book, so that gave me a lot of strength to do it – but ultimately it is just my opinion and my remembrance of that period, which set the template for what has been – as I discovered the other day – a 36-year bass-playing career."

Has Hook found dredging through his memories a cathartic exercise or learnt anything about himself? "I've lived with Ian's death for 30-odd years," he says. "But writing it down on a piece of paper and studying it in depth did bring home the intensity and reminded me of the hope we had for the band, the sadness of seeing that Ian couldn't cope with it, and the decline of his illness. That was the shocking thing, because it was really intense, and it was a really busy time, even while he was dreadfully ill. It made me feel guilty, if anything.

"It's a funny one, because before I did the Haçienda book, I was convinced that everybody else was to blame for the money loss and everything. When I wrote the book, I realised that I was as much to blame as everyone else," he adds with evident wistfulness. "When I did the Joy Division book, I thought I might find the answer as to why he did it, or maybe find a

© Eric Swalens

sort of peace about what he'd done, but it was the same thing. When you were looking at how hard we worked…" he pauses slightly. "I wouldn't say there was a complete disregard for his illness, but we were hoping he'd just get on with it, and he did. I don't think he wanted to give in to his illness either, and I think that was the thing – he didn't want to let us down."

Whatever Hook may have learnt from the writing process, the transition from musician to author is complete, and he's enjoying being lauded in different circles. "The odd thing about being an author is that it seems to have a gravity to it that being a musician doesn't have. When people say, 'Here he is, musician and author,' it's like being accepted by another stratum of society. I do enjoy it, and the Haçienda book did so well – it sold 80,000 – and if this gets anywhere near that I'll be delighted."

Where does that leave Peter Hook the bass player, though? He hasn't released any new music commercially since 2011's *1102 2011* EP, as Peter Hook & The Light, although there appears to be a rationale behind that. "Thanks to the internet and the fact that you don't actually sell any of your recorded work, I've gone off writing music and I miss it," he explains. "I did a track recently for an art installation in Liverpool and I really enjoyed it. It's an odd situation to be in. Trying to write music is harder, but I'm very lucky to be able to do both. It's better than working for a living."

Of course, Hook still has a great passion for the bass guitar. He cites Paul Simonon's strap length and Jean-Jacques Burnel's sound as the main influences for how he wanted to turn out, but it's fair to say that Hook is in the same league as those inspirational musicians. There is one low-ender he looks up to more than others, though. In Hook's office sits the instrument of his all-time favourite bassist.

> "WHEN JOHN ENTWISTLE DIED AND THE AUCTION SOLD HIS GUITARS OFF, I BOUGHT TWO OF THEM"

"When John Entwistle died and the auction sold his guitars off, I bought two of them," he says proudly. "I used the semi-acoustic I bought off him for the last two New Order albums. He was an exceptional bass player. How he never got publishing on those songs is beyond me, because of how much he added. And what a rock'n'roll death – full of coke and in the arms of a hooker."

Unsurprisingly, those guitars are 100 per cent more impressive than the guitars Hooky learnt his trade on. "My first guitar was a copy of a Gibson SG. It cost £35 and it was out of tune between the F and the G. That's what you get when you pay £35," he chuckles. "The second bass guitar I bought was a Hondo, which was a Rickenbacker copy. It was a terrible guitar and when you hit the open E, it used to pop off the nut, so my dad had to make me a little metal grip, which held the strings in place. The stereo didn't work either, but it actually sounded okay, as long as you didn't use the stereo."

After those first guitars, however, he switched to a Yamaha BB 1200 in Joy Division, and still uses it to this day. That finally paid off when Yamaha recently contacted Hook asking if he'd like a new one, thirty years later.

Just as Hook has never changed his playing style, he hasn't changed his rig either. "I use the same equipment that I've used for years: a Hiwatt head and Trace Elliot speakers – the mini cone ones. I use the same set-up I used in Joy Division, which is an Alembic preamp through the Hiwatt 500w head. I use the same pedals that I've used since 1978: an Electro-Harmonix Stereo Clone Theory and a Line 6 digital echo."

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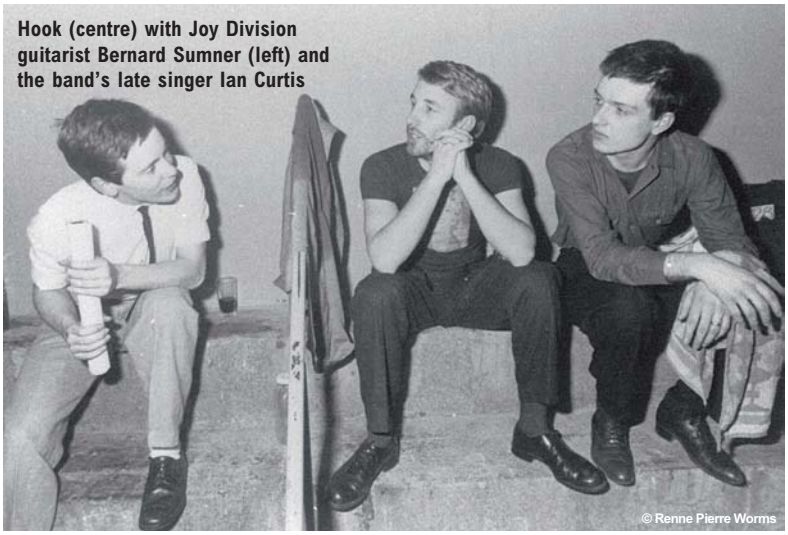
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Hook (centre) with Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner (left) and the band's late singer Ian Curtis

What about strings? "They're quite heavy, because I hit it very hard," he explains. "I've never had to use a compressor because I hit the guitar so hard. I have a very attacking, very fighting-for-attention sound. In Joy Division it fitted in with the other instruments, while in New Order it was used as a counterpoint to the vocals, so that you'd have one melody on the vocal and a competing, fighting melody on the bass guitar. I thought it was great because it added such depth to the music."

"It was only when Bernard went off that and started to change it that I knew," he continues. "One of his great quotes was, 'Oh, you can't have that there. It's getting in the way of the vocal.' I knew it was all over then…"

There he goes, telling another anecdote. It's why writing books has come so naturally to Hook, but after several of his long-time acquaintances took great pleasure in pointing out factual inaccuracies in the Haçienda book, how many embellishments can we expect in *Unknown Pleasures*?

"Would I stretch reality to tell a better story… of course I would – I'm only human! But seriously, no of course I wouldn't. It's absolutely, 100 per cent the truth," he says with mock exasperation and a wink. "As far as I can remember it."

With a New Order book lined up next, it appears that Hook's transition from musician to author is not only complete but, given how he talks about the release of recorded music, irreversible. There must be something inside him that still wants to create music, though?

"I've got loads of riffs knocking about," he admits. "I should just get on with it." There's no doubt he will. ■

Peter Hook is touring the UK in November. Info: www.peterhook.co.uk

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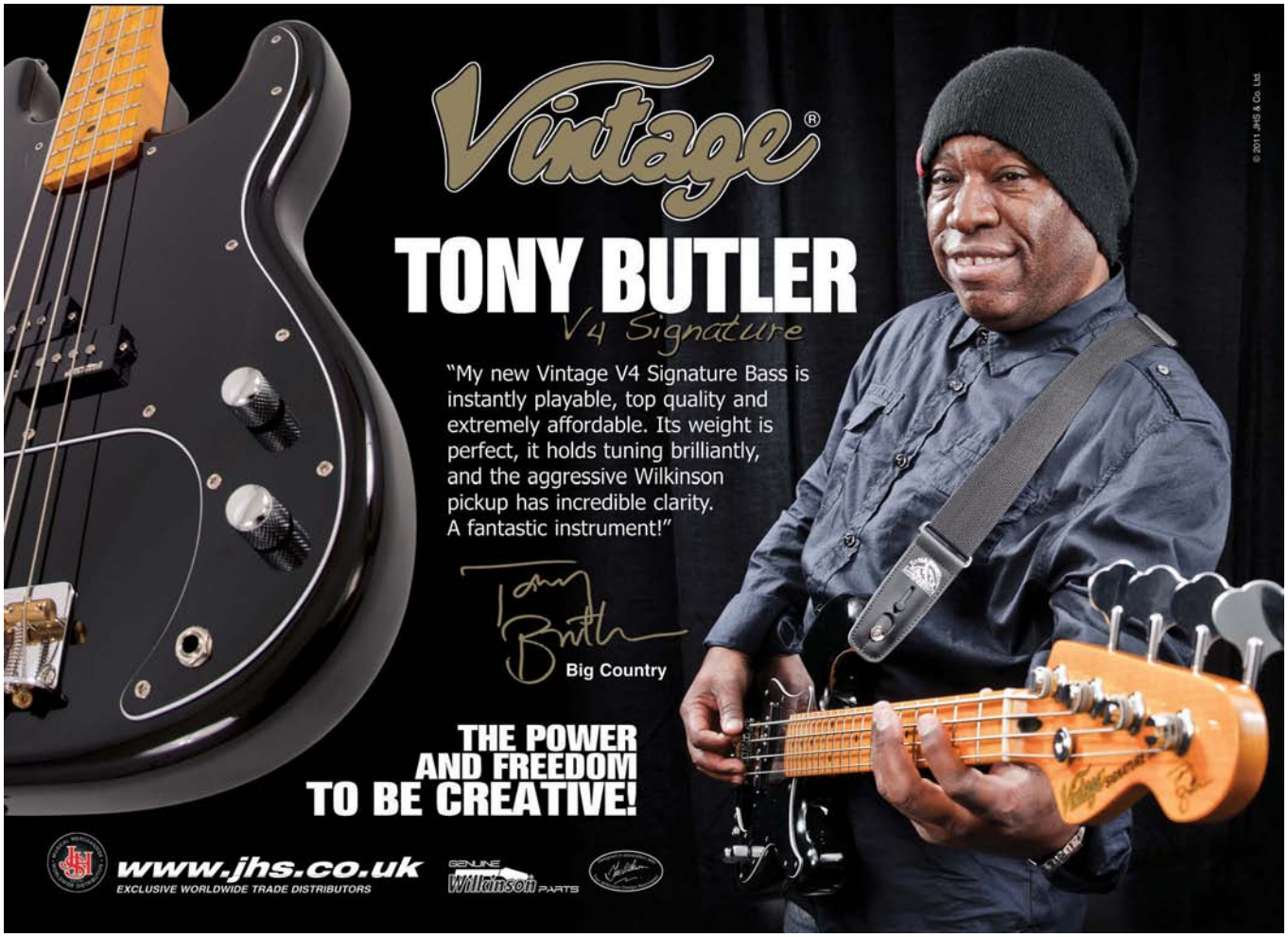
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XXX MARKS THE SPOT

John Wetton of Asia discusses his world-class collaborations, his battle with injury and his supergroup's return to form with Joel McIver

Groups come and groups go, but few possess the longevity or tenacity of Asia, who have survived so many spins of the fashion wheel that they now exist in a kind of timeless niche of their own. Mocked in films like *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, but responsible for millions of album sales, the progressive-rock supergroup consists of John Wetton (vocals, bass), Steve Howe (guitar), Geoff Downes (keyboards) and Carl Palmer (drums).

The respective CVs of these musicians are enough to make any fan of 1970s rock weak in the knees. Wetton served time in King Crimson, Roxy Music, Uriah Heep and UK; Howe and Downes are Yes men, and the latter is also a Buggles alumnus; Palmer, once of Atomic Rooster, is best known as the 'P' in the legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer. That's a fair-sized roomful of talent there.

It's little wonder that Asia's new album, *XXX* (so titled in honour of the band's 30th anniversary) is a killer combination of musicianship and stadium-sized choruses. Wetton is proud of it, saying: "I think it's the best album we've ever done. It's more consistent than the first Asia LP [*Asia*, 1982], even though that album had two big singles on it, and we had the element of surprise. This time, the quality is consistent between songs. We've found our feet and we've found our direction, which is not easy."

He adds: "The whole thing is a paradox, really. We're more confident than we were before, and we're a better band all round this time. It's been seven years since our reformation, which is twice as long as the original band lasted.

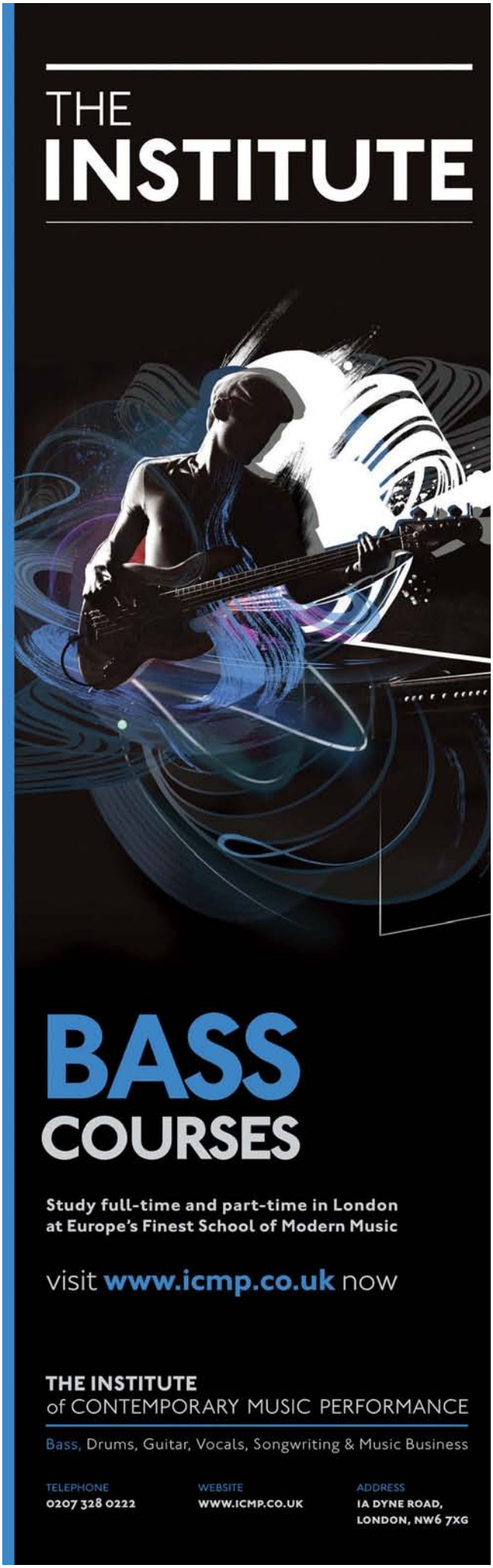
Asia in the early 80s (from left): Steve Howe, Carl Palmer, John Wetton and Geoff Downes

We've accomplished a lot more in terms of albums, gigs and DVDs. We've put out a lot of products, and we're still friendly and professional."

For some years Wetton has been using Zon basses; the latest is a sleek-looking beast called the Black Cat. "I've probably got about 25 basses," he explains, "including a Fender Precision which I don't take out any more or it would be toast. There's a Gibson Victory and an EB3 – which has pretty much disintegrated. There's a Rickenbacker, loads of Ibanezes, a six-string… I haven't dug out the collection in ages. There's not much of any fantastic value there apart from the Gibson, the Ricky and the Fender. They all sound great, but I'm so used to the active Zons that I play nowadays. The new one that they made for me, the Black Cat – or *Il Gatto Nero* – is gorgeous. It doesn't have any knobs on the front: you use a special tool to change them at the back, although once I get a setting for a gig, I don't really change anything. The way active pickups work, it doesn't matter how hard you stroke a string, or how much gain you've got on it, it will still react in a very sensitive way. It'll only come leaping out at you if you hit it hard. You can control most of the tone and the volume with your right hand."

Wetton is equally happy on guitar and bass, but explains: "The stumbling block with bass is that you can't write songs on it. When I was learning church music as a young child, I came to appreciate how the bass-line and the melody line worked within the chords of a tune, and I'm still a bit of a stickler for that. So you'll find a vocal line exactly one third above the bass-line in a given King Crimson song, for instance, which has become something of a trademark of mine. That's straight out of church music. But if you play the bass-line on its own, it's redundant, because you need the other lines too."

Despite Wetton's phenomenal bass chops, he's playing much more stripped-down lines these days – for very good reason. "About five years ago," he tells us, "I woke up and I couldn't feel my entire right arm. It freaked me out, so I went to an osteopath and to the GP, and nobody knew what the hell it was. My whole



GEAR

John Wetton's seven Zon Legacy basses in detail

Legacy Elite, white, 1984
Legacy Standard, gloss black, 2006
Legacy Standard, Ferrari red, 2006
Legacy Standard, flat black, 2006
Legacy Elite, white, 2007
Legacy Elite, white, 2007
Legacy Elite, gloss black, 2012, aka *Il Gatto Nero* (controls for volume, bass, mid and treble mounted on back coverplate)

arm had gone numb. I was expecting the feeling to come back, but it never did. One day I was sitting next to our drummer Carl, describing the sensation to him, and he said 'That's carpal tunnel, I had an operation for that!' I went to Carl's surgeon, who, coincidentally had operated on a ganglion I had about five years before this point, and he told me I had carpal tunnel, predominantly in my right arm, but in my left hand as well. I had an operation – and nothing happened. I have a feeling that he didn't go quite deep enough. It hasn't got worse and it hasn't got better, but I still can't feel my right hand. Now I'm wondering whether to have another operation or not."

This would be a blow for any bass player, let alone one who plays live as often as Wetton, and who has such a flair for complex lines. Asked how much dexterity his right hand has now, Wetton explains: "It's quite difficult to describe the sensation to anyone who hasn't had it. It's like cotton wool underneath the skin of your fingers. You can sense that there's something there, but you can't tell what the texture is or what its temperature is. I have a pick gaffa-taped to my thumb every night, and there's a lot of smoke and mirrors, which is why I wasn't exactly hoping to talk to you about my bass technique! If you'd asked me 25 or 30 years ago, that's what I'd have been talking about. It's a bit of a blow, to be honest, to have a right hand that doesn't work. What I play is a rough approximation of the bass parts, especially in UK songs, which are incredibly complex. I scan the bass parts and play the most important notes. My left hand is still strong, though, so I can make the parts sound convincing. If people turn up expecting to hear the guy from King Crimson, they're in for a shock."

We ask Wetton if he has any advice for touring musicians, and he has plenty, having conquered an addiction to the demon drink as a young man, and survived to tell the tale. "I've been there, done that and got the T-shirt," he chuckles. "The industry has grown up a lot in the time since Asia first formed in 1982. The kind of excesses that were *de rigueur* back then just aren't tolerated any more. It's not okay to screw up any more. If you do, there will be someone waiting to take your place. I was quite partial to a drink myself, and it got the better of me. I always thought that I could control it, but I couldn't. I would say to young players not to bother. It's an illusion that alcohol improves anything. It's best to do it all sober. I'm not saying this in a kind of professorial way. I'm a pretty strong-minded sort of person, and it beat me. Stay healthy, stay focused and stay clean!"

After all his trials, it's no surprise to hear Wetton describing himself as a cooler customer these days. The arguments that once rocked Asia are no more, he tells us. "There's less ego involved than there was in the 80s. The years pass, and you gain a bit of tolerance and patience when it comes to working with other people," he says. "Everyone has to pull in the same direction, or it's not going to work. Before we reformed seven years ago, we'd all experimented enough to know that it was only ever going to work with the original four. You remove one of the four components and it simply doesn't have the same chemistry, so there's a certain acceptance that that's the way it's going to be, and we have to get used to it. None of us are going to change now, and the only way to move forward is to accept that. It's like being stuck with a family, you have to get on with it." ■

Asia's new album XXX *is out now. The band's 30th anniversary UK tour begins on 15 December. Info: www.originalasia.com.*

> "THE INDUSTRY HAS GROWN UP A LOT IN THE TIME SINCE ASIA FIRST FORMED IN 1982. THE KIND OF EXCESSES THAT WERE *DE RIGUEUR* BACK THEN JUST AREN'T TOLERATED ANY MORE"

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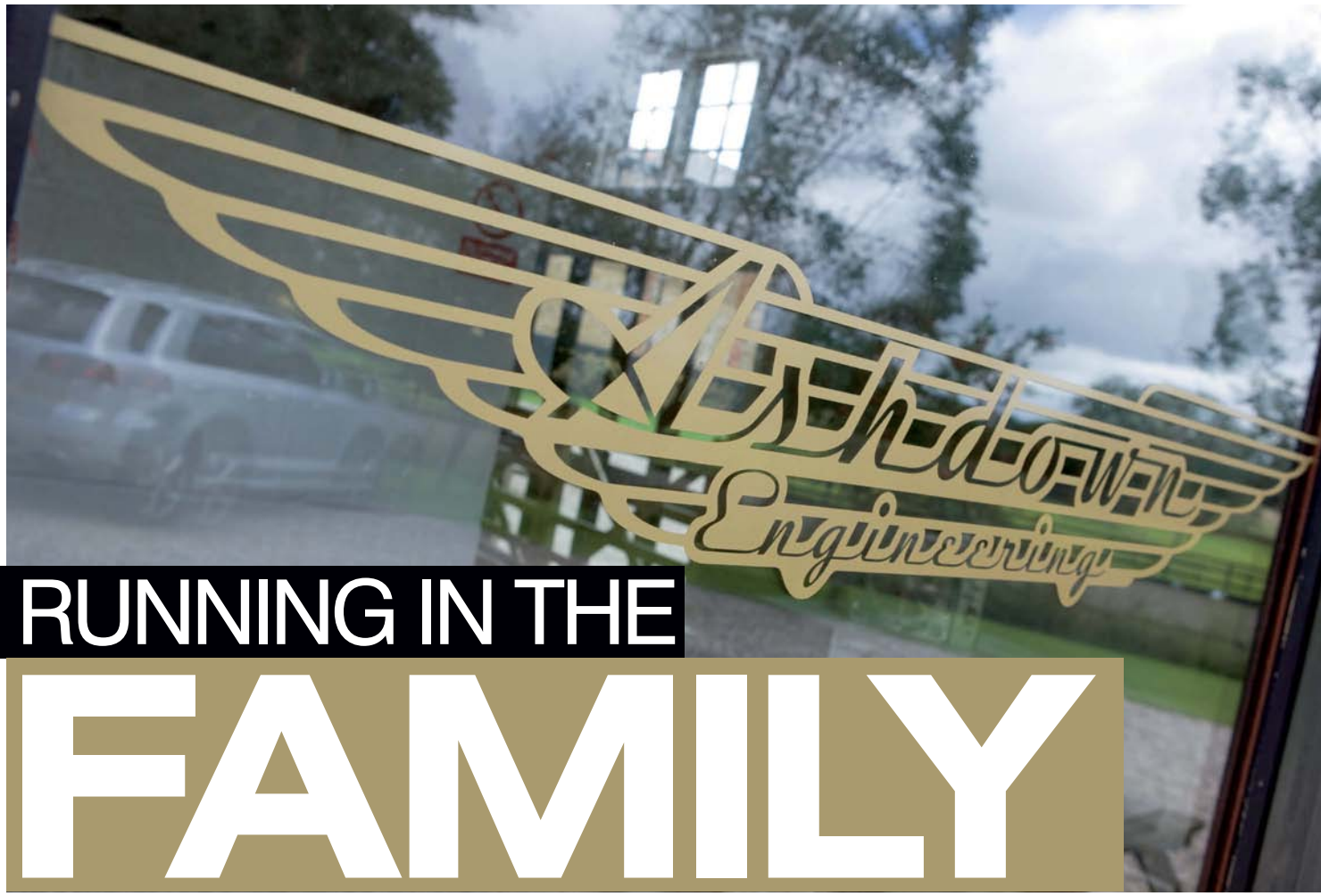

RUNNING IN THE FAMILY

In its 15-year career, Ashdown Engineering has become one of the world's leading bass amplifier manufacturers. Head honcho Mark Gooday chats to Ben Cooper about the secrets of the company's success

In today's fiercely competitive bass amplification marketplace, it's harder than ever for a product to stand out, let alone lead the field. You'd be forgiven, therefore, for thinking that Mark Gooday, head of Ashdown Engineering and former co-owner of Trace Elliot, might be sitting back and enjoying the fruits of his labour. But, as Ashdown celebrates its 15th anniversary, I found him doing something he doesn't normally do: deconstructing the opposition.

"Generally we've never really cared much about what the competition are up to," says Gooday, "but the market is so tough now that you have to be really competitive, and keep an eye on what everyone else is doing."

Ashdown has certainly never been a company to follow the field. Its design ethos reflects Mark's enthusiasm for vintage cars and modern retro, blended with a 1950s vision of future technology – think Austin-Healey meets Dan Dare. This visuals-first policy ensures that bassists worldwide know an Ashdown product when they see one. But, although a small part of him laments the 'buying with the eye' habits of many consumers, it's something that Mark is guilty of, too.

"I wish people bought with their heads, but they don't. I do it too: see something that looks cool, buy it, and then decide whether I actually really like it later. I think people buy with the eye, and, now more than ever, with their pocket in mind. A few years back people might really stretch themselves to buy a product, but now much less so."

Modestly, Mark describes himself as a metal worker and failed musician-cum-engineer, though he has been famous in bass world for years, due to his pioneering work at Trace Elliot. His relationship with the famous amp manufacturer began when he was in the market for a new combo. Having heard about a little company nearby who were making bass amps, he paid them a visit and promptly suggested that they were building things wrong. "I could see that the construction just wasn't quite right. I landed a job with them in 1982 on the production side of things, and eventually became production director."

Trace Elliot soon became a global force, following endorsements from a wide range of international artists. It was a busy time for Mark, who found himself in charge of a workforce over 200 strong. Although he looks back on that time with fondness, it's not something he'd fancy returning to, citing the stress and long hours as the primary reasons. Back then he would work 14-hour days, plus weekends, just to deal with the workload.

"I also had to put a lot of pressure on people, which I was very good at back then! Now it's about balancing designing and engineering work, with a greater focus on quality of life and fun. It'd be nice to be a bit bigger, but I'd never want to be a big box manufacturer."

Indeed, Ashdown, despite its success in the marketplace, operates on a much smaller scale

> "ONE ACHIEVEMENT I'M REALLY PROUD OF IS THE AMOUNT OF MANUFACTURING WE DO HERE IN ENGLAND"
> *MARK GOODAY*

than Trace Elliot, and much of the competition. With a team of just 15 people covering everything from research, development, servicing, factory and warehouse management, marketing and sales, the Ashdown crew are a tight-knit bunch. Mark's son Dan holds a pivotal role in the company's artist relations and marketing department, and the founder's son-in-law is also involved: "Everyone on the team has had a hand in every part of the business; even Dan has built amps and pedals and worked in the warehouse. Chris Bates started working with me when he was 15 at Trace Elliot, and he's still with me now."

I'm curious as to the driving forces behind the creation of Ashdown, following Mark's split from Trace Elliot after he'd sold it to a larger company. "I had a look at the market," Mark says, "and a lot of companies were bringing out amps that were all flashy and 'thwackety-thwack', and, in my humble opinion, not very 'bass' sounding: just very thin. In my simpleton's way of looking at things, I want a bass amp to be huge, fat and loud, driving an 8x10 cab and making people ill. So I saw an opening for an amp that did all that, and that's how the ABM series came about."

Initial tests of the amps elicited high praise, but also a few criticisms on the features front. While Mark wanted the amps to be loud and simple, the folks at the Bass Centre pointed out a possible flaw to him.

"They basically said 'Mark, it sounds great, but there's only three knobs on it' – which was kind of the point, but I went back and put the graphic EQ in. In hindsight that was a great idea, as we got Mark King on board, and he loves to boost that 340Hz."

Early design concepts were slightly off the wall, with blueprint drawings resembling 1950s cookers, but eventually Mark hit on the familiar Ashdown retro look, including the iconic VU meter, and began toting his wares around the trade shows. Fortunately, artists became switched on to Ashdown early on, particularly one Guy Pratt. "I was at a show in the early days, standing by myself, trying to get people interested. Guy came over and said 'You've stolen my sound!' and he's been a firm supporter ever since."

Artist endorsements obviously play a big part in boosting the company's profile and name, and Mark works closely with each artist in developing their signature amp or pedal. Although this complicates and lengthens the process, it's preferable to just slapping a name on a product.

"Sometimes I wish they weren't so involved! I'm kidding of course, but it does mean we have to go through a lot of development time to get the product right. James LoMenzo was our first artist to have a signature pedal, and he was so specific about what he wanted, and where he wanted filters and crossovers to be. It took four or five samples to get it right.

Star Power

The list of artists who endorse Ashdown's products is wide and varied. Punk legend JJ Burnel and funkmeister Mark King both have a signature Ashdown amp, while their staggering roster also includes Nate Mendel of the Foo Fighters and session ace Pino Palladino. Gooday views all the artists as more than simply endorsees of his products.

"They're part of the family. Lots of them came to my children's weddings. I can just hang out with Mark King on the Isle of Wight, ride around on the back of his Harley and have a few beers, he's just a great friend."

Early on, none other than John Entwistle was a great supporter. Mark had a very close friendship with The Ox. "We'd never have had the early success we did without him. I remember building him an amp for his birthday, finishing it at two in the morning and taking it over to him – and it blew up! I'd wired in the transformer wrong because I was so bloody tired. John didn't bat an eyelid and I made him another one. I used to take Dan over to his house and we'd all just sit around and play bass. He was a great man."

"For another pedal we spent the whole day in John Henry's testing and changing things because the artist wanted a bit more bass, or a bit more fuzz. We were trying to get a sound out of one pedal with five knobs, which the artist had been getting from three pedals with 12 knobs. It's great fun, but very time-consuming, and what often happens is that you think you're almost there, and then you make one minor tweak that has a knock-on effect on other elements, and it's back to the drawing board."

This commitment to quality isn't just reserved for the stars, though. If there's one thing that you can be sure of from an Ashdown product, it's that it will be packed with features. In fact, Mark feels they may be guilty of slightly over-engineering their products at times: "I do think we sometimes try and cram a bit too much in. I've been looking at a competitor's amp today; it's 350 watts, and on the back are two jacks. On our equivalent amp we have two SpeakOns by Neutrik, which are about five times the price. So we keep the features in, push the price down and that means we make hardly any money, and you think to yourself, what are we doing wrong? In fact we're doing it right, but it's just that at a certain price point punters don't really want certain features."

With the current vogue for small, lightweight class-D amps, Ashdown seem to be something of an anomaly in their recent push with big valve amps. However, as Mark is quick to point out, Ashdown led the way on class-Ds about a decade ago with the Superfly, but he thinks they have an Achilles' heel.

"The real problem with the current crop of class-D amps is that they shut down when you drive them into a 4-ohm load. You have to protect class-D amps so much that it means they just don't have the dynamic range you want from an amp, and when you turn them up and whack a few notes out, they turn off. But I think we've finally cracked it."

"One achievement I'm really proud of," he adds, "is the amount of manufacturing we do here in England. Not much gets built in our country any more, and certainly not on the bass amplification front. All our big valve amps and custom shop work is done here in the UK. In fact, we still purchase metalwork from the company I worked at before Trace Elliot, as I like to keep as much business in the UK as possible. To be fair to the Chinese-built stuff, though, the quality is just superb. They're so consistent and reliable.

"We inspect every amp that comes in, and we now give a five-year warranty on everything because we're so proud of our amps. In fact our service man, Guy, spends as much time on product R&D as he does on service. It's a bit of a double-edged sword though, because once people buy one, they won't need to buy another! Often we'd go to shows and people would come up and say 'Oh I've had my amp for 10 years' and that's it, they're happy and not going to buy any more, so we have to focus on snaring new customers!"

With new products due for launch by the year-end, just prior to NAMM 2013, Mark is hoping to make big inroads into the US market, where British companies have traditionally struggled. I ask him if he has any idea why that's been the case.

"I'm not sure, really. I think Americans like to buy American, really. I mean look at Marshall: even they aren't as big as you'd expect in the States. But it looks like we're going to break through there, which sounds ridiculous when you look at how many American artists we have on the roster."

Other than breaking the American market, what does Mark see in the future for Ashdown? "I'd like to be a bit bigger," he admits, "but if we're still here in 15 years, doing what we do, all earning a living and enjoying it, then I'll be more than happy. And let's face it, we get to travel the world, meet incredible people, get backstage at all the concerts, and have a great time." ■

Ashdown artists include: **Cubbie Fink** Foster the People . **Nate Mendel** Foo Fighters . **Pino Palladino** Various . **Shavo Odadjian** System of a Down . **James Johnston** Biffy Clyro . **Eric Wilson** Sublime . **Nick Seymour** Crowded House . Made in Essex, England. Appreciated world wide. Ashdown, the new vintage.

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VINTAGE

EJM96, EST96, V8004B, V10005B

Is 2012 a Vintage year? Mike Brooks samples four low-budget basses…

The Vintage range is synonymous with affordable copies of designs that we all know and love. However, one of the basses here reveals that the company is taking steps to incorporate instruments that break away from standard formats. With the introduction of through-neck designs and active circuitry into the range, naturally the price of some of these basses will go up, but has Vintage come up with the goods, and how do the cheaper, passive instruments compare in terms of tone, quality and value for money?

Build Quality

The EJM96 and EST96 models are part of the V96 reissue series, with all the familiar traits of Jazz and Stingray basses. The V8004B takes things up a notch with a fancy bubinga top, while the V10005B is a through-neck, active five-string instrument with some fancy trimmings. All four of the Vintage basses feature a 34-inch scale length.

The EJM96 is exactly what you would expect from a Jazz clone, with a rather thick body-depth and standard contouring at the front and back, although the top body chamfer is very slight. The 20-fret neck is equally familiar, if a little uninspiring due to the chunky feel of the instrument as a whole. However, the neck has a playable profile, and is made slightly more user-friendly by its 38mm width at the nut. A weighty headstock bias is partially remedied by placing it on a strap, and the bass sits at a comfortable playing angle.

The EJM96 is generally well set up, with a decent playing action, no sharp frets and a tight four-bolt neck joint. However, the E-string feels a bit dead, perhaps because this is a review model. It's playable enough, but the bass is what it is, without any frills. Wilkinson hardware – which includes passive pickups, a brass-saddled bridge, 'elephant ear' tuners, and a tortoiseshell-effect three-ply scratchplate – completes the highly familiar vibe.

Moving on to the Stingray-influenced EST96, it's hard in places to tell the difference between this bass and the real thing. The 19mm string spacing, 34-inch scale, and the overall feel and balance are very close to the original influence, although the blonde, almost yellow gloss finish doesn't quite have the natural sumptuousness of the honey-effect natural Stingray. The bass features the expected front and back contouring and, although there is a degree of headstock bias, it balances well on a strap.

The neck profile is a little slimmer than a standard Stingray, and measures 42mm at the nut, while the profile depth is maintained across the whole neck with a slight camber to the fingerboard. The four-bolt neck joint looks reasonably tight, while the 21-fret, two-piece, satin-finished neck plays well and feels comfortable, although it is let down by several sharp frets along the lower neck edge. This lack of attention to detail is evident in the rough finishing along the entire edge of the headstock. The bass features chrome Wilkinson hardware

Technical Specification

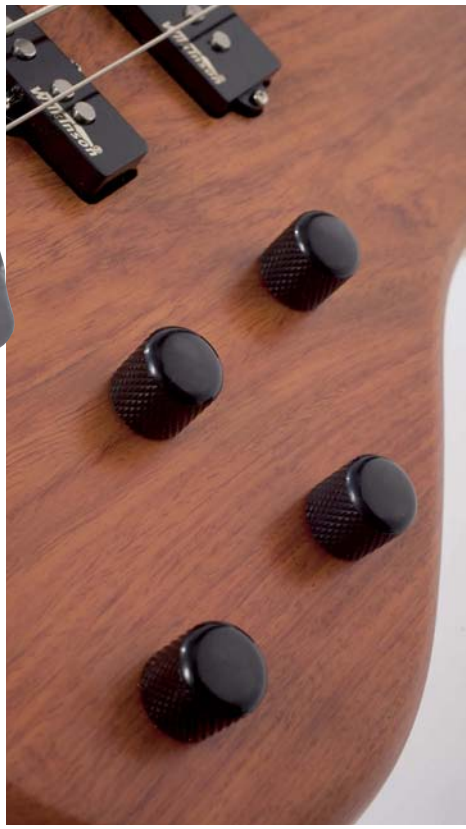
V8004B Four-String Bass
PRICE | £299
COLOUR | Natural
BODY | Eastern poplar, bubinga top
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Wilkinson WPB (split-coil) and WBJ (single-coil) pickups
ELECTRONICS | Passive
CONTROLS | Volume x 2, tone x 2
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJB650
BRIDGE | Wilkinson WBBC, two-way adjustable
MADE IN | China
NUT WIDTH | 42mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt on, four screw attachment
SCALE LENGTH | 34" (864mm)
FRETS | 24
WEIGHT | 3.68kg (8lb 1oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | No
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

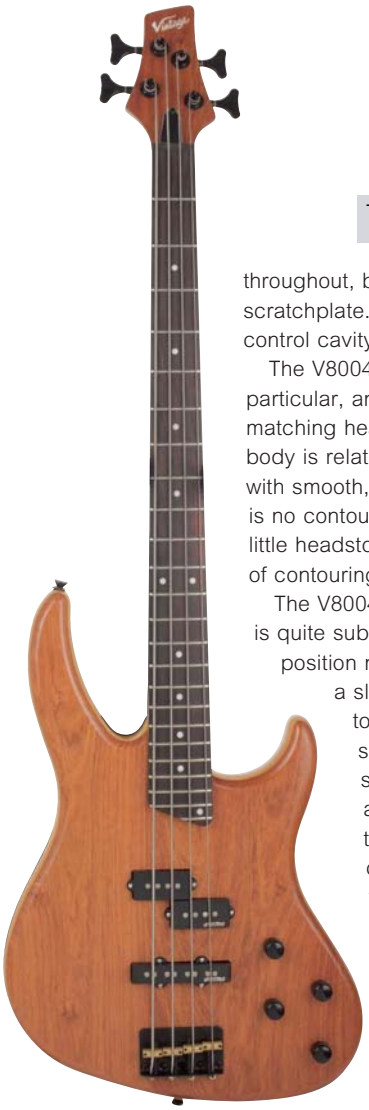
What We Think

PLUS | A well-priced passive four-string with a strong fundamental tone and good playability
MINUS | Lacking in tonal punch and frills
OVERALL | Does what it does well enough, but no real outstanding qualities

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★★★





> "ACOUSTICALLY, THE EST96 HAS A CLEARER, MORE RESONANT TONE COMPARED TO THE EJM96, WHILE THE V8004B HAS A WOODIER TONE COMPARED TO THE OTHER TWO FOUR-STRING BASSES"

throughout, black front and side position markers, and a black three-ply scratchplate. Sadly, despite incorporating a three-band active circuit, the control cavity is not very well shielded.

The V8004B is a different beast, as it's not based on any model in particular, and it signifies a change in direction, with a bubinga top and matching headstock veneer on a poplar body with black hardware. The body is relatively chunky in terms of depth, but has a curvaceous shape with smooth, rounded edging. However, it does feel quite slab-like, as there is no contouring front or back. Unlike the other basses, it demonstrates very little headstock bias and is reasonably comfortable to wear despite the lack of contouring.

The V8004B's maple neck has a four-bolt attachment, and the joint itself is quite substantial and chunky. Its 24-fret rosewood board features white position markers on the front and side facings, while its neck profile has a slim D-shape and a 42mm width at the nut, making it comfortable to play and to get to grips with. Unfortunately, this bass also suffers from a few quality control issues, most notably the rough satin finish on the neck, which isn't even by any means. The E- and A-strings have also been played in to a far greater extent than the D and G, leading to a noticeable difference in tone and clarity across the strings. The setup is quite buzzy, although there are no sharp fret edges and the bass is easy to play.

The five-string active V10005B bass is a real departure, with 24 frets, through-neck construction and gold hardware. The multi-laminate body has a thick depth and features contouring front and back, with a mixture of rounded and sharp edging. Despite its satin finish, again there are patches of rough wood on the body and around the headstock. Thankfully the slim C-shape neck profile has no sharp fret ends, and feels very comfortable to play. The bass is quite heavy with some moderate headstock bias, but as a five-string this is to be expected compared to the other models.

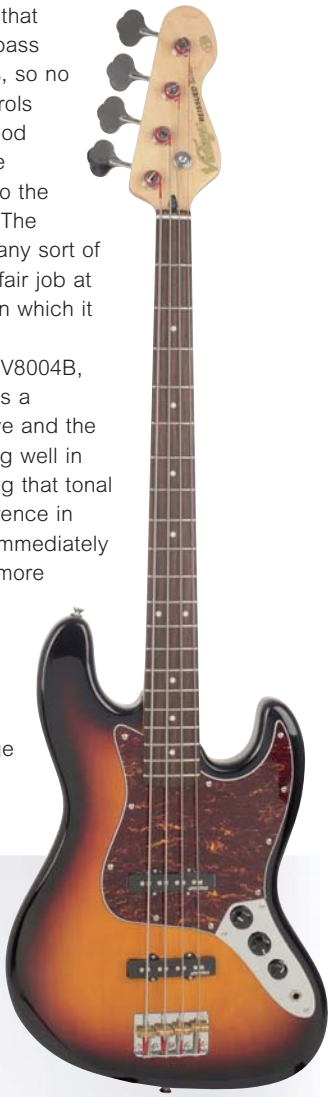
The 44mm neck width at the nut and 19mm string spacing should work for most players, and although there are no front position markers (replaced by the V inlay), there are side markers. The gold hardware includes a two-way adjustable bridge with the ability to choose between through-bridge or through-body stringing, a pair of humbuckers and a sturdy set of machine heads in a three-over-two configuration. A quick peek inside the control cavity shows a busy but tidy group of tied-back cables and plenty of shielding.

Sounds and Playability

All four basses are playable

the distinctive passive Jazz tone that we have come to expect of any bass fitted with two single-coil pickups, so no surprises there. The volume controls increase gradually, which is a good sign; on some basses the volume controls show very little change to the signal volume until the last third. The overall tone is slightly lacking in any sort of inspiring character but it does a fair job at imitating the classic instrument on which it is based.

The second passive bass, the V8004B, puts out another strong signal. It's a relatively high output for a passive and the pickups sound very clear, working well in tandem with the controls, meaning that tonal variation is achievable. The difference in tone compared to the EJM96 is immediately evident: this bass sounds much more distinctive. What it lacks in terms of finesse it makes up for in sheer power, with a tighter mid-range tone that works very much in its favour. Panning between the two pickups opens up a range of familiar tones, courtesy of the split and single-coil pickups. The



and comfortable to wear, although the EJM96 is the kind of bass that makes you want to dig in to get the most out of it – so the fact it feels chunky compared to the other basses is no surprise. The V10005B, on the other hand, is a weighty beast. As a five-string you'd expect it to be heavier than the four-stringers, but at over 10 pounds in weight it may be a little too much for some players to bear.

Acoustically, the EST96 has a clearer, more resonant tone compared to the EJM96, while the V8004B has a woodier tone compared to the other two four-string basses. Naturally, the five-string instrument sounds very different to the other basses, not only because of its through-neck construction but also due to the different timber laminates and the sheer amount of wood used. The low B lacks punch and definition, unfortunately, and appears a little 'flappy' and lacking in distinct character.

Plugging all four basses in, their true colours really shine through and highlight how different they are to each other. The EJM96 has a strong, clear signal and has

Technical Specification

EJM96 Reissued Series V96 Four-String
PRICE | £269
COLOUR | Tobacco Sunburst
BODY | Eastern Poplar
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Wilkinson PB single-coil passive pickups x 2
ELECTRONICS | Passive
CONTROLS | Volume x 2, tone x 1
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJBL200
BRIDGE | Wilkinson two-way adjustable
MADE IN | China
NUT WIDTH | 38mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt on, four screw attachment
SCALE LENGTH | 34"
FRETS | 20
WEIGHT | 4.25kg (9lbs 4oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | No
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

What We Think

PLUS | A classic design with no frills, but it does what it says on the tin, simply and effectively
MINUS | A plain, uninspiring tone and a bit bulky to wear
OVERALL | A reasonably priced Jazz copy, but don't expect surprises

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
VALUE ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪

Technical Specification

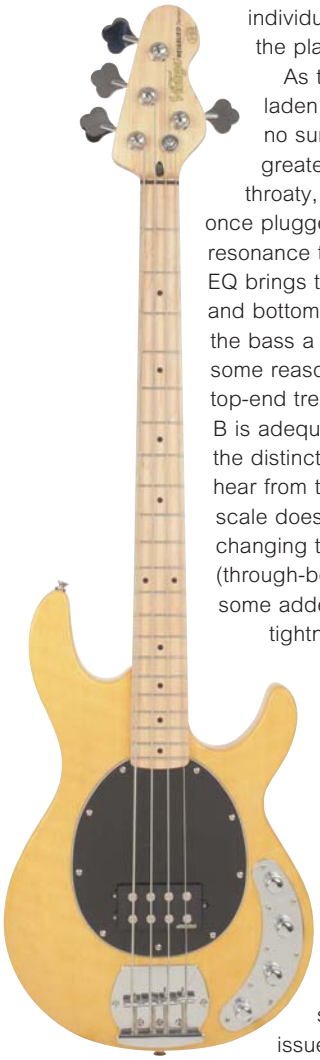
EST96 Reissued Series
V96 Four-String
PRICE | £319
COLOUR | Natural
BODY | Eastern Poplar
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Wilkinson WSM4 humbucker
ELECTRONICS | Active
CONTROLS | Volume, bass, middle, treble
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJBL200
BRIDGE | Wilkinson two-way adjustable
MADE IN | China
NUT WIDTH | 42mm
NECK JOIN | Bolt on, four screw attachment
SCALE LENGTH | 34"(864mm)
FRETS | 21
WEIGHT | 4.1kg (9lbs)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | No
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

What We Think

PLUS | A stunning Stingray impersonator that sounds and plays amazingly well
MINUS | Lack of shielding and poor finishing detract from what could be a real winner
OVERALL | A huge surprise and a real eye-opener, the circuit and pickup combination really nail the classic Stingray tones

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★★★



individual control for each pickup gives the player a wider choice of tones.

As the most expensive and feature-laden bass of the four, it comes as no surprise that the V10005B has the greatest range of tonal options. Its throaty, acoustic tone is unmistakable once plugged in, and shows a depth and resonance that the powerful three-band EQ brings to the surface. The mid range and bottom end are well conveyed, giving the bass a very powerful delivery, but for some reason it just can't deliver a glassy top-end treble response. Similarly, the low B is adequate enough, but it isn't one of the distinctive singing B-strings that we hear from time to time, and the 34-inch scale doesn't help in this regard. However, changing the way the bass is strung (through-body) does give the lower strings some added definition and increases the tightness of the strings, making them less supple.

You may wonder why we left the EST96 until last. Wonder no more – as it is a truly stunning impersonation of the classic Stingray tones, with a thick bottom end, a biting rasp in the mid-range, and ear-shattering treble response. In fact, it sounds more like a Stingray than some official products. This really is a major surprise, as the quality control issues from which this bass suffers

> "AS THE MOST EXPENSIVE AND FEATURE-LADEN BASS OF THE FOUR, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE V10005B HAS THE GREATEST RANGE OF TONAL OPTIONS"

Technical Specification

V10005B Five-String
PRICE | £519
COLOUR | Natural
BODY | Mahogany with maple veneer and bubinga top
NECK | Five-piece maple/nato laminate
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Wilkinson MWJH5 humbuckers x 2
ELECTRONICS | Active
CONTROLS | Volume, pickup pan, bass, middle, treble
TUNERS | Wilkinson WJB650
BRIDGE | Wilkinson BB404, two-way adjustable
MADE IN | China
NUT WIDTH | 44mm
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
SCALE LENGTH | 34" (864mm)
FRETS | 24
WEIGHT | 4.82kg (10lbs 6oz)
CASE/GIG BAG INCLUDED | No
LEFT HAND MODEL AVAILABLE | Yes

What We Think

PLUS | A well-thought-out five-string bass with a good tonal range
MINUS | A bit too heavy for some players, with a dominant mid-range tone
OVERALL | A reasonably priced bass that will appeal to five-string beginners

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★★★★★

let it down a little, but its sonic performance is outstanding. A run through the full range of each centre-detented control (12dB at 5kHz, 12dB at 2kHz, 12dB at 100Hz) blows other cheap Stingray copies out of the water. Fingerstyle players will love its burpy character, coupled with its tight overall response, while slappers will find it very difficult to put the bass down.

Conclusions

As you'll have gathered, this is a very mixed collection of basses. The passive instruments do a reasonable job, and at their respective prices it's hard to quibble with their performance. To our ears, the V8004B is the more distinguishable of the two in terms of tone. It's also lighter and therefore more comfortable to play, with a 24-fret range, surely making it worth the extra £30. Having said that, there will always be a market for a simple Jazz clone and the joys it has to offer. The five-string model is quite a leap in price at over £500, but it is clear to see and hear where the extra expense is going, and for anyone starting out on the road to five-string glory, at this price there really isn't too much to complain about – apart from the weight issue.

But it's the EST96 that stands out as the shining light of the lot, although it's a pity that the level of finishing and quality control let it down. If these were addressed, Vintage would have a runaway success on their hands. It may also be of interest that Vintage offer a five-string version of this bass with a RRP of £339, and if that bass is as good as the four-string version, there could well be a clamour for these budget imitations of such a classic design. All four basses have finishing and set-up issues, but let's be clear: these may just be unlucky examples. Were you to find better examples out there in the shops, you might consider yourself a very happy bassist indeed, particularly where the EST96 is concerned. ■

18+

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AVAXHOME-

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MAYONES JABBA AND COMODOUS

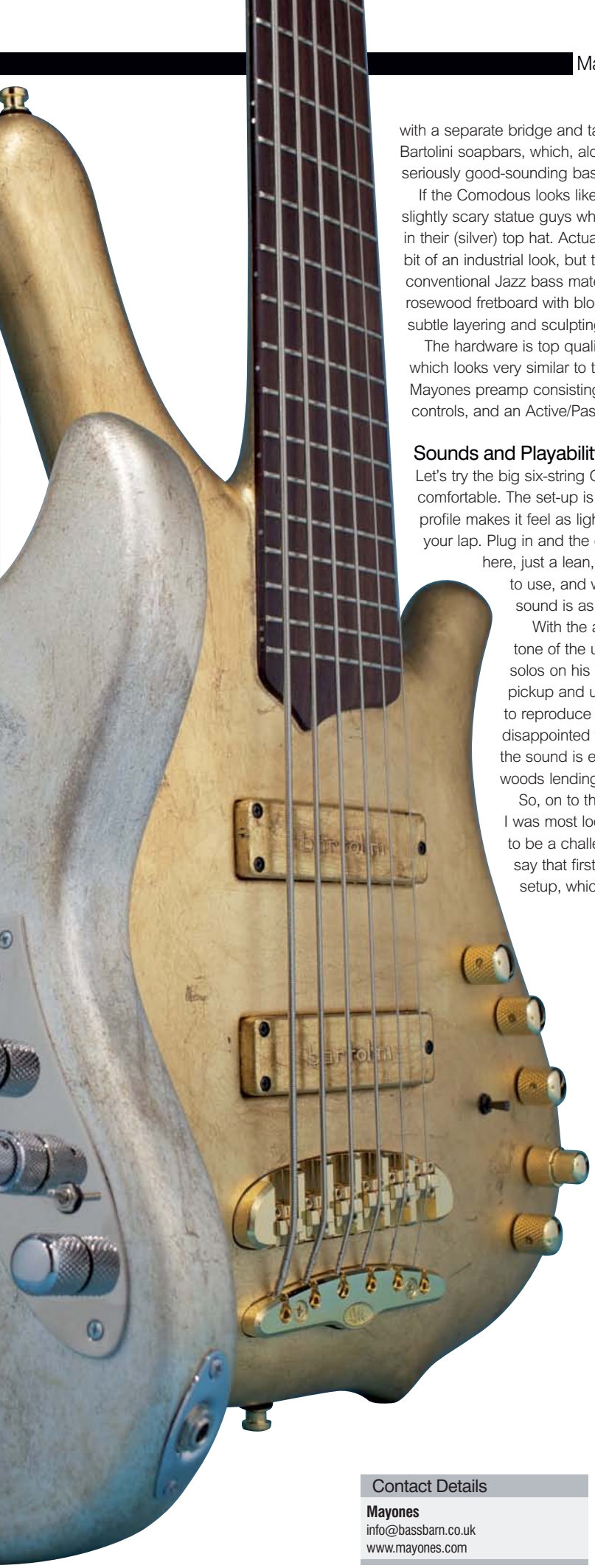
Kev Sanders dips into the Mayones jar for some tasty, but pricey, bass snacks

If you're a central European metal bass player, you'll know all about Mayones. If you haven't yet heard of them, the chances are it won't be long before you do. The company has an impressive online presence – Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, and their own brilliant website. As well as all this social activity, Mayones is rapidly gaining a reputation for building excellent quality instruments at much more affordable prices than we've come to expect from custom builders.

Build Quality

Both the Jabba and the Comodous are part of the MBC range, meaning they're both built by a single luthier in a workshop. Let's take a look at the Comodous first.

I know from reading the spec that there are some tasty timbers used in this bass: an American ash body, a maple top and a through-neck made from nine layers of maple and mahogany. The spec says that the fretboard is ebony, but it's rosewood: a very nice piece of rosewood, but rosewood nonetheless. With regards to the neck and body, we'll have to rely on what the spec sheet says because the whole bass is covered in an 'aged gold' finish. Personally, this look doesn't really do it for me. I can't help thinking it looks like a bass shop's Christmas decoration (Bah, humbug! – Ed). However, what definitely does do it for me is the hardware and pickups. The gold hardware is of the highest quality,



with a separate bridge and tailpiece, Schaller M4 tuners and gold knurled controls. The pickups are Bartolini soapbars, which, along with the three-band Aguilar preamp, should combine to make a seriously good-sounding bass, whatever you think about the appearance.

If the Comodous looks like a Christmas bauble, the finish on the Jabba reminds me of those slightly scary statue guys who cover themselves in silver paint and stare at you until you put money in their (silver) top hat. Actually, I think the silver works better than the gold, giving the bass a bit of an industrial look, but to be honest I'm still not entirely convinced. The Jabba follows fairly conventional Jazz bass materials and construction, with an alder body, maple neck and bound rosewood fretboard with block inlays. The neck joint looks tight and super-solid, with six bolts and subtle layering and sculpting around the end of the neck, allowing for better access to the top end.

The hardware is top quality, with Schaller M5s and straplocks, and a Mayones custom bridge, which looks very similar to the old Badass design. Pickups are Delano JJs and there's a custom Mayones preamp consisting of volume, balance, mid, stacked treble/bass, and passive tone controls, and an Active/Passive switch.

Sounds and Playability

Let's try the big six-string Comodous first. Picking up the instrument, it immediately feels comfortable. The set-up is nigh on perfect, and the smoothed body contours and shallow neck profile makes it feel as light and as easy to play strapped on as it does when you're sat with it on your lap. Plug in and the quality of those pickups and preamp are striking. There's no hiss or hum here, just a lean, clean and powerful bass tone. The Aguilar preamp is easy and intuitive to use, and with the gain on your amp upped to give you enough headroom, the sound is as good as you'll hear from any six-string available today.

With the active switch on and the pan set slightly towards the back pickup, the tone of the upper range immediately reminds me of those beautiful John Patitucci solos on his Yamaha TRB 6P: clean, accurate and dynamic. Turn to the front pickup and up the low end and the sound is huge. You need decent amplification to reproduce the dynamic range of this bass, but if you have that, then you won't be disappointed with the tone. It really is stadium filling. Between these two extremes the sound is everything you could want: weighty and detailed, with the quality of the woods lending a smooth and rich timbre.

So, on to the Jabba. Being a big fan of high-quality super-Jazzes, this was the bass I was most looking forward to playing. Following the Comodous was always going to be a challenge, however, and despite the obvious quality of the Jabba, I have to say that first impressions weren't as good as I'd hoped. This was partly down to the setup, which needed a bit of tweaking before I could really get to grips with the

Contact Details

Mayones
info@bassbarn.co.uk
www.mayones.com

Technical Specification

Jabba
PRICE | £1935
MADE IN | Poland
BODY | Alder
NECK | Maple
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
NECK JOIN | Bolt-on construction, six bolts
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 34.25”
BUTTONS | Straplocks
MACHINE HEADS | Schaller M4
BRIDGE | Mayones Vintage
PICKUPS | 2x Delano
ELECTRONICS | GP-BP2 active 2-band
CONTROLS | Volume, balance, middle, stacked treble/bass, active/passive switch
HARD CASE | Included

Technical Specification

Comodous
PRICE | £3600
MADE IN | Poland
BODY | American ash with maple top
NECK | 9-ply maple/mahogany
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 34.25”
BUTTONS | Straplocks
MACHINE HEADS | Schaller M4
BRIDGE | Mayones two piece
PICKUPS | 2x Bartolini soapbars
ELECTRONICS | Aguillar OBP3 active
CONTROLS | Volume, balance, middle, stacked treble/bass, passive tone, active/passive switch
HARD CASE | Included

sound, but the Jabba also didn’t feel quite as comfortable to play as I’d expected. The body shaping and contours are all fine, and the neck, although quite chunky, was still comfortable, but combined with the slightly weighty feel, it took a while for me to settle with it.

I soon found that the front pickup, being so close to the end of the neck, meant that slapping was bit tricky until you got used to it. However, lengthen the strap, crank up the volume and this bass starts to make a lot more sense. The controls will be familiar to anyone who’s played an active Jazz, and this makes dialling-in your sound quick and easy. With the pan rolled towards the neck pickup, and the stacked treble and bass on full tilt, you have a kicking rock bass sound. Hit it hard with a pick and it gets even better. All those metal bass players obviously know a good thing when they hear it.

Conclusion

While Mayones have obviously thrived for the last 30-odd years on making instruments mainly for our heavy metal brethren, I think it’s only a matter of time before everyone else cottons on to these basses. They have a lot to offer on all fronts, with top quality materials, hardware and build quality at a price that’s very reasonable for hand-made instruments. Although the gold finish on the six-string Comodous could possibly be a bit gaudy for some tastes, the bass is a cracker, and if you’re in the market for a top-quality, hand-made six-string you really should try one.

That said, I’d like to see Mayones be a bit more confident in their own design. The Comodous is very close in appearance to the Warwick Thumb 6, and immediately invites comparisons with that bass. The fact is that the Comodous, in itself, is a fantastic-sounding instrument and it would be great to see it gain its own distinctive visual identity.

After playing the Jabba for an hour or so, it started to feel much more comfortable. Realising that, first and foremost, this is a bass designed to be played loud and hard, it made much more sense. It’s perhaps not as versatile as the Comodous, but it’s still a great bass, and even among the multitude of hand-made five-string super-Jazzes available, it stands out as great value.

Thumbing through the Mayones brochure, I notice that both of these basses are available with a range of options and natural finishes. That being the case, could I have the Jabba with the Buckeye burl top, the Bartolinis and the Aguilar preamp please? ■

What We Think

PLUS | Great value for hand-made basses featuring top quality timbers, electronics and hardware. Wide range of options available
MINUS | Design of the Comodous a bit derivative, Jabba perhaps not as playable and versatile as a Jazz
OVERALL | If you can live with the finishes of these basses, both represent great value for handmade instruments, with the Comodous in particular being outstanding in terms of sound

BGM Rating

Jabba
BUILD QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
VALUE ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪

Comodous
BUILD QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
VALUE ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪

STATUS KINGBASS PARAMATRIX

After 30 years, Status Graphite reckons it's developed the perfect signature bass for Mark King. Joel McIver does 100 one-thumb press-ups, ready to take it on…

Mark King of Level 42 is to slap bass what Marks & Spencer is to ready meals, or what Birds Eye is to fishfingers – in other words, the ultimate exponent of the style. It might be a bit grander to say that he is to slap what Ferrari is to supercars, or Hollywood is to movies, but that would be pointless, ignoring the fact that there is something very British about King's playing and songwriting. King is without a doubt the finest slap player ever to emerge from this sceptr'd isle. His nearest American equivalent would be Les Claypool of Primus, whose style and sound is markedly different, and who emerged into the public eye only a few years after Level 42. But compare the two: King's slapping is razor-sharp and precision-engineered; Claypool's is raw and complex. The former sounds like a Brit; the latter an American. We make this point simply because it leads us to appreciate more finely the qualities of the Status Kingbass, King's weapon of choice for many years, which has landed in our laps in its latest incarnation, the Paramatrix. It's a slinky, eminently playable, very expensive instrument that's as British as Stilton. Let's have at it!

Contact Details

Status Graphite
www.status-graphite.com. Thanks to Eugene for the loan of this bass.

Build Quality

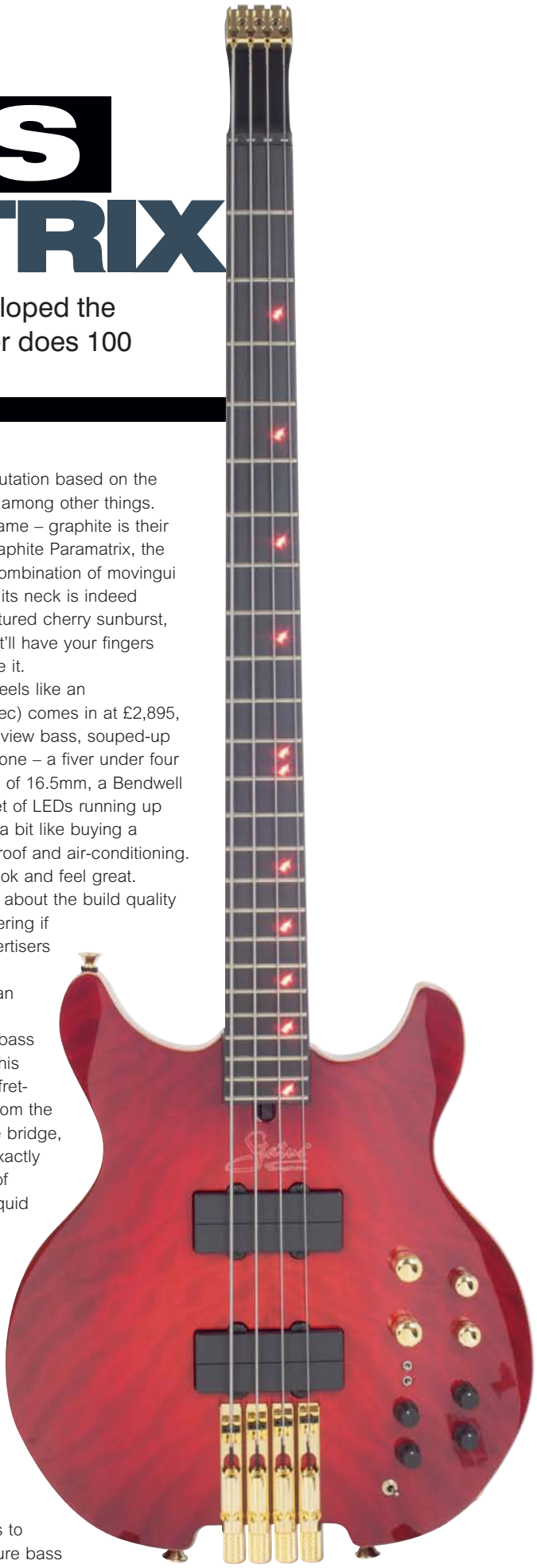
Status Graphite has built a formidable reputation based on the quality and endurance of its bass bodies, among other things. The secret of their construction is in the name – graphite is their chosen material. While King also has a graphite Paramatrix, the model we've been sent for review has a combination of movingui and mahogany woods in its body, though its neck is indeed graphite. The top finish is a beautifully textured cherry sunburst, with a raft of gold and black hardware that'll have your fingers itching to get tweaking as soon as you see it.

The basic Paramatrix (although 'basic' feels like an inappropriate word, given the top-level spec) comes in at £2,895, which is £1,100 less than this particular review bass, souped-up as it is to King's exact requirements. This one – a fiver under four grand – has a King-friendly string spacing of 16.5mm, a Bendwell (which we'll come to in a minute) and a set of LEDs running up the front and upper edge of the neck. It's a bit like buying a Mercedes and shelling out extra for a sunroof and air-conditioning. These things aren't mandatory, but they look and feel great.

There is literally nothing negative to say about the build quality of the Paramatrix. In case you were wondering if we're saying that because Status are advertisers in *BGM*, or because they've offered us a discount on their next bass design, you can rest easy. This bass is genuinely flawless. That doesn't mean that it's suitable for all bass players: far from it. We simply mean that this is a precision-manufactured guitar. Every fret-end is sleekly buffed, every component, from the giant, regal-looking slab of gold that is the bridge, to the smoothly-detented controls, does exactly what it is supposed to, with perfect ease of operation. This bass costs four thousand quid for good reason.

Sounds and Playability

The Paramatrix will not be the right bass for most people reading this magazine, despite its undeniable quality. Sure, Mark King doesn't only play slap bass; he is a master of many techniques. However, the ace of spades in his pack is undoubtedly the slap style for which he is famous. Bass held at armpit level, forearm damping the strings, and gaffa-taped thumb whirring furiously, the man himself cannot be equalled when it comes to the art of high-speed funk, and his signature bass

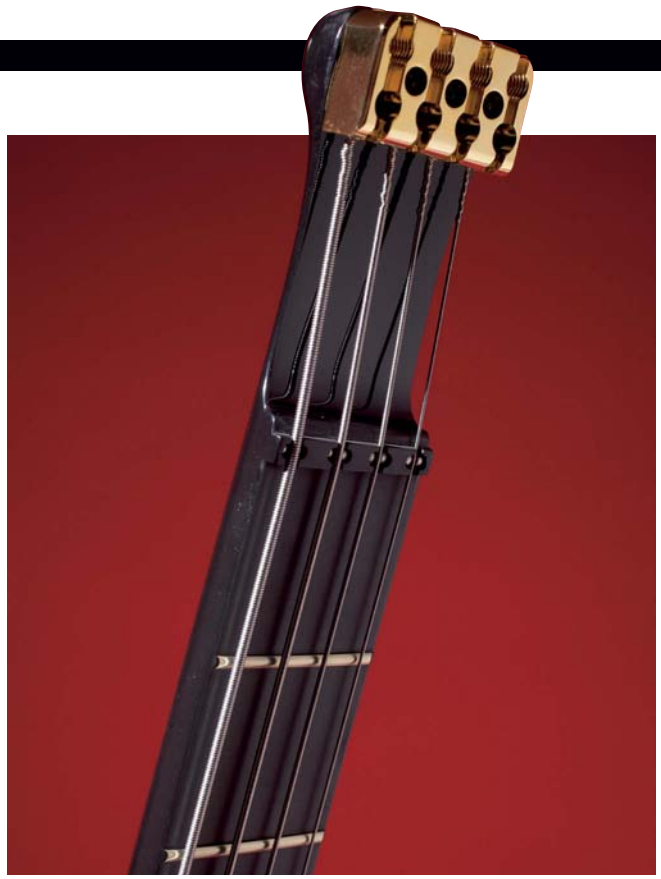


Technical Specification

PRICE | £2895 plus extra £1100 for Bendwell, 16.5mm string spacing and LEDs
MADE IN | UK
BODY | Figured movingui facing, mahogany back, cherry/amber sunburst finish
NECK | Graphite, two-way truss rod
FINGERBOARD | Graphite
NECK JOIN | Through-neck
FRETS | 24
SCALE LENGTH | 32"
MACHINE HEADS | Status
BRIDGE | Status
PICKUPS | Two Status Bi-Max, hum-cancelling, four coils each
CONTROLS | Master volume, pickup balance, treble and bass cut/boost, low parametric control (85-850 Hz), high parametric control (1.5-12 KHz), each with extra centring control
HARD CASE | Included

What We Think

PLUS | Build and tone are both as flawless as a bass can be. We're still gobsmacked
MINUS | This is a quirky, eccentric instrument despite its brilliance: its personality may not be for everyone
OVERALL | The Paramatrix Kingbass is exquisitely built to do a particular job very well indeed. If that's your job too, don't hesitate to invest



> "IF YOU HAVE MORE COURAGE THAN WE DO, OR INDEED MORE URGENT REQUIREMENTS FOR A KILLER SLAP TONE, DIVE RIGHT IN WITHOUT HESITATION"

is tailored perfectly to that style. It is not an all-rounder's bass. There are entire genres of music for which it would be wholly inappropriate. What the Paramatrix does, with great efficiency and power, is sit high on its player's body with perfect balance, deliver a raging set of tones and – via its eyeball-searing LED system – announce 'I am Mark King's bass!'

The overall weight of the Paramatrix is fine, but in the seated position the body feels the tiniest bit bottom-heavy thanks to the lack of a headstock, and the size of the bridge and tuners. No matter, just adjust your position slightly. Then there's the Bendwell, a space between zero fret and nut where you can bend the strings… well. With a bit of zeal and strong fingers you can go up a third, although a semitone or tone is where the Bendwell's limit feels happiest. This takes no time at all to get used to. If you're happy with headless basses, the overall feel is very friendly, as is the graphite neck in its entirety: the surface is slick but not slippery, with a fast profile that doesn't lack a feeling of solidity. Tuning is simple, too, once you've got used to which way you need to turn the tuners. In order to make the most of this bass, you'll have to unlearn what you know about the familiar broccoli machine heads from headed basses.

For us, the elephant in the room, insofar as there is one, is the Paramatrix EQ system. Approaching this produces the same feeling that rookie engineers get, when they move from a four-track home recorder that fits into a Tesco carrier bag to a 96-track Pro-Tools rig that is the size of an aircraft hangar. It's a wonderfully designed and produced system, but its complexity is a little intimidating. Mark King requires a particular range of bright tones for his slap and fingerstyle playing, and the EQ here is designed to facilitate that – but for the rest of us, even half the options available would be enough for the average gig. So be warned.

If you have more courage than we do, or indeed more urgent requirements for a killer slap tone, dive right in without hesitation. The two Bi-Max pickups have four coils each, which permits two single-coil options and a twin-coil option. Mix them up and you have no fewer than nine coil possibilities, all hum-free. The three-way coil switching option is new to the Paramatrix, as are the ingenious parametric controls. One of these is set to control high frequencies between 1.5 KHz and 12 KHz. The other controls low frequencies from 85 Hz up to 850 Hz. Each parametric circuit has two controls: one of them allows the player to set the exact centre of the frequency, the other adjusts the amount of cut or boost at that frequency. Got all that? What this means in practice is that you have a hell of a lot of tone options and a wide range of sounds at your fingertips. Do you need all that? Mark King does, but you, amigo, are probably not Mark King.

A word about the LEDs on the fingerboard. We love them, although we'd feared that they might be a bit off-putting. They're not even remotely so, but you'll need to have thick skin if you use them: the jeers of 'show-off!' from your band-mates and audience will be non-stop.

Conclusion

What a bass this is, eh? Playable, tonally versatile and a veritable work of art. But who is it for? Would you play it down by your knees in a punk band, or use the Bendwell in a jazz trio, or switch on those lights during a studio session? You could if you wanted to: remember, rules are just mind control and, after all, this is rock'n'roll.

However, where we see this bass finding its most useful spot is in a funk band, exactly where it supposed to be. Funk-friendly basses are everywhere these days, and you certainly don't need to spend this much money to get one. Still, the Paramatrix is that rare thing – a bass with as much personality as its owner – so if that's what you're after, get yourself one with our total approval. Oh, and if you do end up playing one in a metal band, send us a picture immediately… ■

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★★★★½½

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TC ELECTRONIC BH250

TonePrint technology is integrated into the new BH250 bass amp head at a price that's hard to believe, says Dave Clarke

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They're lightweight, portable, powerful, and increasingly able to hold their own in a playground full of bigger brothers. The micro-amp revolution shows no sign of letting up, and I, for one, am all for it. These little boxes of dynamite may not yet be the default amps for your average stadium-sized gigs, but I doubt that many years will pass before the only amp that any bassist ever needs will be the size of an old Filofax. Danish brand TC Electronic's new BH250 bass head is a significant step in this direction, possessing all the aforementioned qualities, and it's now integrated with TCE's impressive TonePrint technology.

But I had one nagging doubt. Would the amp's 250 watts – connected to a cabinet, or combination of cabs, with a minimum impedance of 4 ohms – be enough for bassists looking for an amp able to hold its own in small-to-medium-sized venues, without burning a hole in your pocket? If so, the BH250's price tag of just £235 seems almost too good to be true…

Build Quality and Features

As with most micro-amps, the BH250's dimensions (8.7"x2.5"x9.1") mean that it easily slips into a gig-bag pocket. And, at just 4lb (1.8kg), you needn't feel guilty about asking anyone over the age of five years old to carry it up a flight of stairs for you. Still, at that weight you could be forgiven for questioning what exactly the wizards at TC Electronic have put under the hood of their new bass amp head. The answer, I'm happy to report, is above and beyond what you could reasonably expect for such an unfathomably low financial outlay.

Standing on four sturdy rubber feet, this class-D amp is housed in a metal chassis with a stylish red brushed and anodised aluminum front plate, complete with built-in 'ears' for optional rack mounting. The front panel is home to the input socket, a gain switch for active and passive basses, a built-in tuner for four-, five- and six-string basses, a mute switch for all outputs, a master volume control, and what initially appears to be a simple set of bass, middle and treble tone controls. I say 'simple', but TC Electronic's intelligently contoured tone controls cut and boost at different frequencies (bass cut, 80Hz; bass boost, 100Hz; mid cut, 500Hz; mid boost, 800Hz; treble cut, 1800Hz; treble boost, 3150Hz), making it easier to access an effective tone to suit your own playing requirements.

TC Electronic's *pièce de résistance*, however, is the integration of their superb TonePrint technology, which allows for a variety of preset effects to be beamed to the amp via a free app available on smartphones or, if you prefer, via a USB cable connected directly to a computer. The white TonePrint knob on the front panel controls the effects' input level, and the default setting is a warm, rich chorus. BassDrive, Flanger, Octaver, Vibrato and SpectraComp are all available to beam up as and when required. There are several variations for each of these effects, including numerous signature TonePrints, created by the likes of Duff McKagan, Mark King, Gail Ann Dorsey and Nathan East, among many other respected bassists.

The back of the amp is home to the on-off switch, the mains socket, the optional footswitch jack input, a USB socket, speaker output (Neutrik Speakon), a mini-jack headphone socket, and a balanced output XLR socket which can be set at either pre- or post-preamp. There is also a mini-jack Aux In/Rehearsal input and the amp comes with a mini-jack to mini-jack lead for connection to an iPhone or similar playback device. The headphone socket also plays back any signal connected to the Aux In/Rehearsal input, allowing you to play along to any connected audio source at any time of day or night without fear of being arrested for antisocial behaviour.

Sound Quality

Using a Musicman Stingray, I made instant use of the BH250's built-in tuner, which runs continuously, with or without the mute switch activated. Considering that this is a feature that you are pretty much guaranteed to utilise every time you plug your bass

in, it remains a mystery why all bass amp manufacturers don't include a built-in tuner as a standard feature. It's also one less bit of kit to carry around with you.

Setting the amp's three EQ controls to 12 o'clock, my bass and I were instantly greeted by TC's recognisable warm, clear tone. Using the intelligently contoured tone controls, I was quickly able to tap into a wide range of tones, often from just playing around with the mid-EQ. When I dropped the mid-EQ I enjoyed a fat and funky tone. In contrast, when I cranked-up the mid-EQ, it resulted in a decidedly harder, edgier rock tone. Pretty simple stuff, but very effective.

The concerns I had over the BH250 delivering enough volume to satisfy the requirements of a small to medium-sized venue were all but forgotten after turning the master volume control to maximum. I was actually shocked at the volume generated. With the Stingray's bottom end rumbling like Barry White gargling iron filings, I was troubling my eardrums and diaphragm more than the amp. But even at seemingly excessive volume, the tone managed to remain surprisingly tight and punchy, with the only deterioration in sound quality being very much courtesy of the SoundTech speaker cabinets struggling to keep up.

Realistically, I couldn't seriously imagine needing to turn the master volume control much past the one or two o'clock position to cover most of the gig scenarios I'm likely to encounter. However, if you simply have to have the added security and headroom provided by an amp with Death Star-type firepower then there are plenty of alternatives on the market, complete with a higher price tag.

I'd been looking forward to trying out the TonePrint technology for some time. Downloading the free app to my iPhone took a matter of seconds and, on the TonePrint section of the app, I decided to try one of the flanger effects. As a fan of Mark King I was eager to check out his signature TonePrint, which is endearingly called 'Sweet Minger'!

Following the simple direction on my iPhone's screen, I held the phone's speaker an inch from the pickup, before a '3-2-1' onscreen countdown began. The effect was then beamed through the guitar's pickups into the amp. As it does this, the phone quietly makes a sound similar to that of a fax machine, before the TonePrint's LED light flashes on the front of the amp to indicate that it has successfully received the effect, and it's ready to use. Then it's just a matter of setting the level of the effect. The whole process from start to finish took about 12 seconds.

Readers who are worried that this all sounds a bit complicated and gimmicky – trust me, it isn't. I now had Mark King's 'Sweet Minger' flanger effect running through the amp and was thoroughly enjoying having 'his sound' filling the rehearsal studio.

I swiftly proceeded with an awful attempt to replicate Mark's bass playing.

Lots more fun followed as I dialled in Duff McKagan's chorus tone, Roscoe Becks' octaver tone and Michael Shuman's vibrato tone. A word of warning, though: one of TC Electronic's own BassDrive tones called 'The Beast' is inexplicably set at a volume so loud it made my speakers feed back, sending me scurrying for cover in the far corner of the studio. Attempting to turn down everything while disorientated by the equivalent of a sonic landmine is, I fear, something all unsuspecting TonePrint-using bassists will eventually experience. In fairness to the other BassDrive tones on offer, though, they all work a treat and deliver some very satisfying sounds. My only disappointment was the lack of an envelope filter in the TonePrint effects range. I asked TC Electronic about this and, without committing to a date, was told that there's every chance of one becoming available in the future. If and when this does happen, all you'd have to do to obtain the new effect is perform a simple app update on your phone and a firmware update for the amp via your computer or laptop using the USB lead. While TC are at it, I'm hoping they can arrange for Bootsy Collins to create his own signature TonePrint, just so we can help to keep the funk alive as authentically as possible, you dig?

Until such updates occur, I'll still be heading to rehearsals and gigs armed with my trusty envelope filter pedal, but this is still preferable to packing half-a-dozen different pedals, complete with the requisite hardware.

Conclusion

TC Electronic's BH250 bass amp looks good, sounds great, packs a big punch and comes with several very useful features, while the TonePrint technology serves as the icing on the cake. At just £235, I honestly had to check (twice) that this is indeed the correct price for this unit. The BH250 is equally at home in the studio and at both small and medium-sized venues, and for many bassists, this amp will leave nothing to be desired. With this in mind, I will be very surprised if the BH250 doesn't become a huge hit with bass-players all around the world. ■

Technical Specification

PRICE | £235
MADE IN | China
INPUTS | ¼ inch jack, Aux In
OUTPUTS | Balanced XLR with pre/post pre-amp selector, headphone out
EQ | Three band bass, mid and treble
POWER | 250 watts
FEATURES | Built-in tuner, TonePrint technology, mute switch
WEIGHT | 4lb
DIMENSIONS | 8.7"x2.5"x9.1"

What We Think

PLUS | Powerful with small dimensions, highly affordable, TonePrint technology
MINUS | No envelope filter in the TonePrint effects range (file under 'nit-picking')
OVERALL | A brilliant bass amp at an unbeatable price

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
VALUE ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪

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5038 - Duesenberg Starplayer 4, Trans Orange

Fender

4882 - Fender USA 62 Vintage Precision Sunburst
9084 - Fender American Special Jazz Bass, CAR
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9413 - Fender American Special Jazz Bass, White
9353 - Fender Am St Hand Stained Ash Jazz Bass
8431 - Fender USA Standard Jazz Bass in Black
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
7943 - Fender Am Stan Precision Bass, Sunburst
9388 - Fender 70s Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9286 - Fender FSR Precision Bass, Sea Foam
7076 - Fender Highway One Precision, Wine
8928 - Fender Marcus Miller Jazz Bass, Sunburst
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
8929 - Fender Roger Waters Precision Bass
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
4749 - Fender Standard Precision, Candy Red
9284 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Arctic White
5572 - Fender Standard Precision, Arctic White
5190 - FleaBass The Wild One Junior, Black
9138 - G&L L2000 Tribute Bass, 3-Tone Sunburst

LEVIN

4999 - Levin LB100J, Antique Sunburst
6640 - Levin LB200, Cherry Sunburst
6780 - Levin LB400, Redburst

LODESTONE

8073 - Lodestone Primal Artist
8075 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Green
8076 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Sburst
8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8078 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Cream
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro in Chignal Blue
8083 - Lodestone Primal Pro, Rodings White
8082 - Lodestone Primal Pro 4, Tobacco Sunburst

MUSIC MAN

4703 - MusicMan Stingray 2EQ, Blue Pearl
4781 - MusicMan Stingray 3EQ, True Gold
7923 - Musicman Gilded White Classic Stingray 4
8997 - Musicman Sterling SB14 Bass, Sunburst

Overwater

4253 - Overwater Aspiration Artist, Trans Red
4250 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe 4, Amber
8435 - Overwater Aspiration Std 4, Black Cherry
7849 - Overwater Contemporary Jazz, Trans Blue
8198 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Sunburst
4355 - Overwater UK Perception, Natural
9262 - Peavey Forum Bass, Red, Pre-Owned

RockBass

5122 - Rockbass Fortress 4, Blue
5309 - Rockbass Streamer Standard, Blue Stain

Squier

7204 - Squier Classic Vibe Precision 50s Blonde
7260 - Squier P Bass Std Sp Lefty Antique Burst
4615 - Squier Vintage Modified Jazz 77, Black
9072 - Squier Vintage Modified 70's Jazz, Nat
4417 - Steinberger Spirit XT2 4 String Bass
7922 - Ventures VMB75 Bass Guitar, Candy Apple
8436 - Warwick Thumb Bass 4 Bolt on in Natural
8229 - Washburn WB66 Idol 4 String in Trans Red

WestCoast

6447 - Westcoast BG2, Natural or Trans Red
6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
8438 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Black
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red

YAMAHA

4649 - Yamaha BB2024X, Vintage White
6953 - Yamaha BB424, Vintage White
9350 - Yamaha BB424 Bass Guitar in Black
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black

5 String Basses

9139 - G & L L2500 5 String Bass, Blueburst
8214 - Lightwaves Saber 5 String Fretless Bass
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
5713 - Marleaux M Bass Custom 5, Maple & Walnut
4178 - Marleaux Votan Deluxe 5, Blue Jeans
4920 - MusicMan Stingray 5, Black

Overwater

9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
7259 - Overwater Perception Std 5, Bubinga
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
9263 - Wesley 5 String Bass Guitar, Purple
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber

YAMAHA

9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
9352 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Sunburst
8275 - Yamaha BB425X, Vintage White
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black

6 String Basses

5723 - Marleaux Consat Custom 6, Natural
9005 - Yamaha TRB1006J 6 String Bass

Acoustic Basses

breedlove

7479 - Breedlove JB350 CR4, Electro 4, Blonde
8301 - Breedlove Electro Acoustic Bass Natural
8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
7874 - Fender Kingman Bass, Electro 4, Natural

LEVIN

5393 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Black
5394 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Natural
5392 - Levin LAB150 Bass, Electro 4, Sunburst
6782 - Levin LB100 Bass, Electro 4, Sunburst
7301 - Ovation USA Elite, Electro 4, Natural

Electric Upright Basses

4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
4909 - Bridge Cetus Elec. Double - Marble Finishes
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass

String Deals

2 Sets of Elite (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Elite (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £35 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £40 inc P&P

Bass Combos

6762 - A arena BASS45 (45W, 1x12)
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
4942 - AER Amp Two (240W, 1x12)

Ashdown

4389 - Ashdown 220 Touring 112 (220W, 1x12)
4388 - Ashdown 220 Touring 115 (220W, 1x15)
4385 - Ashdown 330 Touring 115H (300W, 1x15)
4386 - Ashdown 330 Touring 210H (307W, 2x10)
4382 - Ashdown 550 Touring (550W, 1x15)
5066 - Ashdown 550 Touring Hybrid (550W, 2x10)
6759 - Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo 3 (575w, 1x15)
8712 - Ashdown ABM414H 4 x 10 Bass Cabinet
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
4396 - Ashdown DP200 Drophead 15H (200W, 1x15)
8757 - Ashdown Electric Blue 12 220
8758 - Ashdown Electric Blue EB15 220
5669 - Ashdown EB180 12 Evo2 (180W, 1x12)
5668 - Ashdown EB180 15 Evo2 (180W, 1x15)
5665 - Ashdown Five Fifteen (100W, 1x15)
8751 - Ashdown Five Fifteen ABM100 Combo
8753 - Ashdown Five Fifteen Mini Rig 100
4397 - Ashdown LB30 Drophead 115H (30W, 1x15)
6454 - Ashdown MAG C115-300 Evo2 (300W, 1x15)
8718 - Ashdown Mag C115 300 Evo III Bass Combo
8722 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Evo III Bass Combo
8720 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Bass Combo
8727 - Ashdown Mag C410T 600 Evo III
9320 - Ashdown MiBass C110-200
9321 - Ashdown MiBass C115 550 Bass Combo
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten 40 Bass Combo
5666 - Ashdown Perfect Ten (30W, 1x10)
9311 - Ashdown TE12 C115h Bass Combo
9310 - Ashdown TE12 C210h 12 Band Bass Combo
8183 - Ashdown TourBus 10 Union Jack
5224 - Ashdown Tourbus 10 (10W, 1x6.5)
5062 - Ashdown Tourbus 15 (15W, 1x8)
8988 - EA Euphonic Audio iAmp 350 Bass Head
8987 - Eden Nemesis RS410 Combo

Fender

4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
8284 - Fender Rumble 30 Bass Combo
4237 - Fender Rumble 350 (350W, 2x10)
9278 - Hartke A70 Solid State Bass Amp Combo
9008 - Hartke HMH112C Bass Combo
9281 - Hartke Hydrive HMH210C Bass Combo
9279 - Hartke Kickback 15 Bass Amp Combo

LINE 6

6020 -Line6 LowDown Studio 110 (75W, 1x10)

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P (400W, 2x10)
6238 - Mark Bass CMD103H (400W, 3x10)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (400W, 1x12)
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (300W, 1x15)
5473 - Mark Bass Micromark (50W, 1x6)
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (400W, 1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P (400W, 1x15W)
5471 - Mark Bass Minimark (250W, 2x6)

Marshall

5660 - Marshall MB15 (15W, 1x8)
6768 - Marshall MB150 (150W, 1x15)
5659 - Marshall MB30 (30w, 1x10)
5433 - Marshall MB4210 (450W, 2x10)
5658 - Marshall MB4410 (450W, 4x10)
6769 - Marshall MB60 (60W, 1x12)

ORANGE

5232 - Orange Crush PiX 100BXT (100W, 1x15)
5234 - Orange Crush PiX 25BX (25W, 1x8)
5233 - Orange Crush PiX 50BXT (50W, 1x12)
8061 - Peavey MAX126 10 Watt Bass Combo
5965 - Peavey Max 112 (35W, 1x12)
5964 - Peavey Max 115 (50W, 1x15)

Roland

6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w, 1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)
8252 - SWR Black Beauty 350W Bass Combo
5008 - Stagg 20 BA (20W, 1x8)
4599 - TC Electronic BG500 115 500W, 1x15

Bass Heads

4387 - Ashdown 330, 330W
4398 - Ashdown 427 Small Block 427W
4384 - Ashdown 550, 550W
8706 - Ashdown ABM1000 Lite Evo III
8704 - Ashdown ABM2000 Lite Evo III
6760 - Ashdown ABM500 EVO III 575W
6250 - Ashdown ABM500RC Evo III 575W
6761 - Ashdown ABM900 EVO 3, 575+575W
4399 - Ashdown JJ500 JJ Burnel Sig 575W
5338 - Ashdown BTA400 400W
8707 - Ashdown CTM300 Classic Tube Magnifier
4395 - Ashdown Drophead DP200H 200w Valve
5064 - Ashdown Little Bastard 30, 30W
4875 - Ashdown Little Bastard 30, 30W UK
8708 - Ashdown Little Bastard 550 Head
5671 - Ashdown Little Giant 350, 350W
6455 - Ashdown MAG300H Evo III 300W
9056 - Ashdown Mag300H Evo2 Bass Amp Head
8713 - Ashdown Mag600 Head Evo III Bass Head
6710 - Asdown MiBass 220
7975 - Ashdown MiBass 550 Bass Amp Head
9309 - Ashdown TE12 500H 12 Band Bass Head
9349 - Hartke HA2500 Bass Head
9027 - Hartke Kilo 1000 Bass Head
9280 - Hartke LH500 Bass Guitar Amp Head
5500 - Line6 LowDown HD750, 750W
5675 - Mark Bass Little Mark 250 (250w)
5245 - Mark Bass Little Mark 800, 800W
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III (500w)
9035 - Markbass Little Mark Tube Bass Amp Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
5673 - Mark Bass R500 Classic (500W)
5243 - Mark Bass SD1200, 1200W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Bass Head
9256 - Markbass Big Bang 500W Bass Head
9250 - Markbass Classic 300 Head
9251 - Markbass Club SA450 450W Bass Head
5674 - Mark Bass F1 (500w)
9253 - Markbass F500 500W Bass Head
9249 - Markbass L Mark Rocker 500 Bass Amp Head
9255 - Markbass Momark Modular Bass Systems
9252 - Markbass TSA500 500w Bass Head
5434 - Marshall 1992LEM 100W
5652 - Marshall MB450H 450W
6618 - Marshall VBA400 Valve 400W
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
5242 - Orange TB1000 1000W Terror
5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
5957 - Peavey Pro VB3 300W
5960 - Peavey Tour 450, 450W
5959 - Peavey Tour VB2 225W
5184 - TC Electronic RH450, 450W

Bass Cabinets

8733 - Ashdown 210T Deep Lite Bass Cab
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
6458 - Ashdown ABM210H Compact (2x10)
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
4376 - Ashdown ABM610 (6x10)
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
4394 - Ashdown CL115 Large (1x15)
4393 - Ashdown CL410H (4x10)
4392 - Ashdown CL414H Plus Horn (4x10)
4391 - Ashdown CL610 Tilt-Cab (6x10)
4390 - Ashdown CL810 (8x10)
6146 - Ashdown NEO115H Compact (1x15)
8170 - Ashdown Klystron NEO410H 4 x10 Bass Cab
6452 - Ashdown MAG115 Deep (1x15)
6451 - Ashdown MAG210T Deep (2x10)
8754 - Ashdown MAG414T Deep Lite
8730 - Ashdown Mag 115 Deep Lite Bass Cab
8755 - Ashdown Mag410T Deep 4 x 10 Bass Cab
8756 - Ashdown Mag810T 8 x 10" Bass Cab
9315 - Ashdown Mi10 Bass Cab
9316 - Ashdown Mi12 Bass Cab
8692 - Ashdown VS112 125 1 x 12 Bass Cab
4379 - Ashdown VS115 200 (1x15)
8691 - Ashdown VS212 200 2 x 12 Bass Cab
8711 - Ashdown VS412 600 Bass Extension Cab
9007 - Hartke HCH112 Bass Cab
9292 - Hartke HCH410 Hydrive 410 Bass Cab
5371 - Line6 LowDown 410 (4x10)
5430 - Mark Bass Classic 152 (2X15)
4766 - Mark Bass NY804 New York 804 (8 x 4)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
6767 - Marshall VBC412 (4x12)
6617 - Marshall VBC810 (8x10)
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
5240 - Orange SP210 Smart Power Isobaric (2x10)
5239 - Orange SP212 Smart Power Isobaric (2x12)
5238 - Orange SP410 Smart Power Isobaric (4x10)
6766 - Peavey 410TVX (4x10)
5182 - TC Electronic RS210 (2x10)
5181 - TC Electronic RS212 (2x12)
5180 - TC Electronic RS410 (4x10)

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

EDEN WORLD TOUR PREAMP PEDAL

Stadium-sized tones from a pedal the size of a chunk of supermarket cheese? Joel McIver gets his stamping foot ready…

Contact Details

Eden Electronics
www.eden-electronics.com

This weeny pedal, whose full name is the slightly wearisome Eden ETDI World Tour Preamp/Direct Box, claims to provide an impressive set of tones for its size and price tag. We're suckers for little gizmos that do a big job here at the *BGM* command bunker – have you noticed our fetish for matchbox-sized amp heads lately? – so when this fun-sized stomp box landed on our desks, we were all too keen to give it a go.

This pedal gives you an impression of implacable solidity considering its size. You know you could run across the stage right before solo time, stamp on it at the last possible second, and it wouldn't snap in half and flip into the front row. The gold surface makes it highly visible on your pedalboard, and the controls rotate smoothly and quickly. In fact, a small twist of each one makes a notable difference to your tone – so don't go nuts. A little goes a long way, as that old TV ad for Brylcreem (ask your grandfather) used to say.

The controls, spread over two rows, are split into EQ at the top (bass, mid, treble), with two dinky red in-out push buttons for extra bass and mid boost. Do not underestimate the power of this battle station… er, sorry, these two boost buttons. Tweak your EQ until you've found a good, workable tone, and then give either of these a nudge. You'll be surprised how the relevant frequencies leap at you. In particular, the bass boost control adds huge depth to your tone. It's easy to add too much, in fact, and risk an overly boomy sound. Meanwhile, that mid boost will add a zippy crackle (sorry about the technical jargon) that will give you the ability to cut through any wall of guitars with ease. Your soundman might whine at you, especially if you keep switching it on and off every few seconds just to annoy him.

The bottom row of controls is even more fun to play with. The Gain control performs an obvious function, but what's less predictable is how powerfully it works. Whack it up to halfway and the aggro quotient of your tone will be significant, certainly enough for anything but the most demanding gig. Next to that is the Enhance knob, a cunning device that focuses on boosting

> "THERE'S JUST TOO MUCH POWER AND VERSATILITY IN THIS LITTLE FELLA TO PASS UP"

> "THE BIGGER PICTURE IS THAT WE BASS PLAYERS ARE IN A PRIVILEGED POSITION AS THE 21ST CENTURY STAGGERS UNCERTAINLY ONWARDS"

only isolated chunks of low, high-mid and top. Although this provides way too much boost for most playing environments unless operated with extreme care, it's the perfect tool when your bass tone is getting lost, lacks clarity or otherwise needs a bit of extra oomph (those technical terms again). Next to this fierce little control, the Compressor option seems pretty mundane, although it's obvious why it's there, given the volume spikes that will occur if you attempt to operate the Enhance pot when overly 'refreshed'.

All right, so the Eden WTDI performs beautifully; no-one could deny that. The real question is: why buy one, other than it looks cute? When was the last time you saw a bass amp that lacked at least a reasonably sophisticated EQ system? Not only that, but dedicated frequency boosts are fairly commonplace on the front of your amp head or combo, too.

As we see it, you'd be better off splashing out a mere 90-odd quid (exchange rates permitting) on this pedal than on a boost or volume pedal, without a doubt. There's just too much power and versatility in this little fella to pass up. If you're lucky enough to have a bedroom studio or small rehearsal rig, as well as a larger amp for live work, then those would be useful places to keep your WTDI too. Would we take it out on the road or deploy it at one of our band's regular stadium shows? (Okay, just a bit of imaginative licence there.) You could, but it would probably be redundant, as its controls appear on most amplifiers anyway. It would definitely be useful as a backup or for headphones practice on the bus or plane, given that you can stick it in your hand luggage.

And there you have it. It's a game little pedal, this one: punching above its weight, over-delivering on tone for the price, and giving its owner real boost options in situations where a kick is needed. Sure, it doesn't break new ground, but its makers don't make that claim. The bigger picture is that we bass players are in a privileged position as the 21st century staggers uncertainly onwards. The music industry may be in rigor mortis, and the live circuit ever more saturated, but in terms of high-quality, affordable gear, we've never had it so good. The Eden WTDI is, we hope, a sign of ever-better options to come. ■

Technical Specification

PRICE | £93 (approx: US price is $150)
MADE IN | China
CONTROLS | Gain, Bass, Bass Boost, Mid, Mid Boost, Treble, Compressor, Enhancer, Master Volume, ground lift
WEIGHT | 567g
DIMENSIONS | 114mm x 51mm x 89mm
POWER SUPPLY | 9V AC (UK plug adapter not included)

What We Think

PLUS | Great range of tones for the price
MINUS | Your amp EQ may already suffice
OVERALL | Useful box of tricks at budget price for tone hounds

BGM Rating

BUILD QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY ✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪✪
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THE WOODSHED

Collector and consultant Andy Baxter invites *BGM* into his inner sanctum

"I started out just stocking basses that I liked and would play on stage. But as time has gone on, I've had more and more inquiries for the weird and wonderful – so my inventory has expanded." This is Andy Baxter speaking, bass expert and the man to talk to if you have a query about an unusual, valuable or desirable bass guitar. His store, Andy Baxter Bass, was established in 2009 and offers a wide range of basses from the obvious names like Fender, Gibson, Rickenbacker and Music Man, to more esoteric manufacturers.

Like many bass dealers, Andy started his career as a professional musician. "I've played bass since I was 13 or 14," he recalls. "I got straight into a band at school and never looked back. I've toured the UK and mainland Europe along the way, mainly in a band called Battant, and I currently play rhythm and blues in a band called Jerry Tremaine & The Rising Suns. I also do session work here and there, mainly for Andrew Weatherall."

Andy's own bass collection started humbly, before becoming a professional concern, he tells us. "I started off with a cheap Encore Precision copy, then gradually moved up to my first vintage Fender, which was a 1974 Jazz in black, with a maple fingerboard and black blocks. I played that bass consistently until about a year ago, when I acquired a 1969 Jazz with a rosewood board, which I had refinished in Olympic white by my good friend Joe at Joseph Kaye Guitars. Along the way I worked for Barry Moorhouse at the Bass Centre. Being surrounded by basses and bass-players all day sparked my interest further, and I bought a 1965 Jazz in sunburst. Then came a modern Music Man Stingray, and then a pre-Ernie Ball Stingray. After the Bass Centre shop was closed down, I was looking for something to do with myself – and through a connection I'd made, I looked into buying and selling vintage basses. The first step was to sell my small collection to raise the funds to start a business. That's how I began buying and selling basses."

Running a retail business in this precarious day and age must be fraught with difficulties. He agrees, saying, "One of the pitfalls is trying to get the pricing right. I obviously need to make a margin on each bass, but at the same time, my main focus is to provide high quality vintage basses that are sensibly priced. The main thing is to not get carried away by greed. I pride myself on being very fair with my prices, and I'm always willing to cut a deal. The other thing is to do your research if you're not sure about something. I started out as a player who loved vintage guitars, not as an expert. I still feel strange when people refer to me as an expert – truthfully I'm learning as I go along. I also learn from some customers who may have more knowledge about a specific type of bass."

Andy meets some bass obsessives on his travels, he tells us. "One example would be a collector I know who has a wealth of knowledge about old Höfner, Gibson and Gretsch semi-hollow-body

> "I'VE SOLD BASSES AND AMPS TO SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS, COLLECTORS, SESSION PLAYERS AND SOME FAMOUS ROCK STARS"

basses. Another guy I met recently is an expert on Rickenbackers – so much so that he's written a book on them. I'll take advice and help from anyone, but I prefer it if they wait to be asked!"

Actually handling a vintage bass is a precise process. "I pride myself in taking great care to document all the details regarding a bass guitar," he explains. "I take over 50 pictures of each bass, including the internal details like pot and pickup codes, and also any areas of wear or damage. I also make sure I describe the basses very well. This way customers know exactly what they're getting and they can buy in confidence."

After a few years in business, what have the high points been when it comes to dealing in bass guitars? As he says, "I've handled so many basses over the years, some very rare, some extremely expensive, and some owned by famous players. The famous bass I'm selling at the moment is Norman Watt-Roy's 'Blockhead' bass, which is a 1962 Fender Jazz in Shoreline Gold. The rarest and most expensive bass I have sold is on my website – a 1964 Fender Jazz in gold sparkle, a one-year-only custom colour. It's 100 per cent stock and all original. A rare bass of particular interest was a 1985 Rickenbacker Shadow. Only 50 were ever made, and I had one for sale. That kind of bass puts a smile on my face. I love the Gibson RD Artist basses too, and this year I had one in every colour hanging on the wall, which was really cool."

Has he got any celeb customers, we wonder? "I've sold basses and amps to so many different people over the years, collectors, session players and some famous rock stars," he says. "I value all customers and just enjoy playing and talking bass, but I was particularly excited to have sold an Ampeg B15 to Gary 'Mani' Mounfield, a bass player I grew up listening to when he was in the Stone Roses the first time around." If it's good enough for Mani, what are you waiting for?

For information, go to www.andybaxterbass.com, or visit Andy at Scrutton Street, Shoreditch/Hoxton, London EC2A 4RX. ■

Chris Hanby

Chris has amassed a staggering amount of insightful, interesting and sometimes irrelevant information on bass guitar equipment during his career as a professional bassist. Some would say it's a gift, others that he is a nerd, either way we continue to push boxes of electronics under his nose and make him report to us on his favourites.

SUBDECAY QUANTUM STARLIGHT

History

The owner and founder of Newburg, Oregon-based pedal company Subdecay Studios is Brian Marshall. He has been producing some very interesting boutique effects pedals over the last 10 years, and his philosophy of vast functionality and simple controls has seen Subdecay accrue favour with many musicians. Bassists soon latched onto the brand following positive reactions to the pedals' build quality and tone: Subdecay effects suffer no loss of signal and often feature bassist-friendly additions like bias controls. Due to Marshall's continuing success, the company now produces a range of filters, echo/reverb units, synth fuzz pedals and, more recently, the DLX (deluxe) versions of the popular Quasar phaser and Prometheus filter. The DLX pedals all feature a bewildering array of functions (see the Prometheus DLX review in *BGM 80*), and the newly introduced Quantum range takes several of the key features from the DLX series and puts them in a smaller, easy to use package, making for very giggable pedals.

In Use

The Hammond case size, simple layout and stylish graphics all combine to make the aesthetics of the Starlight very pleasing. The pedal uses a Bucket Brigade MN3209 chip in an all-analogue circuit. The clever part is that it's using digital controls to shape the sound, making this a doddle to set up sounds on the fly. The Shape knob offers six different LFO settings: Sine, Triangle, Triangle/Square, Random sample/Hold, Step-Triangle and Manual. Of the other two white knobs, Speed adjusts the rate of the LFO and Regen acts as an effects level, allowing more of the effect to be fed back into the pedal as you turn clockwise. When in Manual mode, the Speed knob sets the frequency for static flanging.

Inside the housing are three internal trim pots that adjust the control voltage, feedback and BBD delay bias. They're correctly set up in the factory and the user manual strongly urges you to avoid tampering with them as you could reduce the effect to nothing, or be left with undesirable clipping.

Starting off with the Sine wave setting, and leaving the other two knobs at 12 o'clock, you are washed with a blanket of swirly flange: exactly what you'd expect from a traditional flanger pedal. Turn the Shape and Regen controls down to 25 per cent and you get a very nice shimmering chorus. The Triangle and Triangle/Square modes offer subtly different characters, all rich and playable. Adding in more of the Regen knob enhances the effect further, from noticeable flange at the mid point to overwhelming metallic twang towards its upper extremes. Increasing the Speed knob takes you from gently floating chorus to near vomit-inducing vibrato – the aural equivalent of extreme strobe lighting. That said, the sound of the Starlight is anything but sickening. It's very clean and quiet. The effect is lush and musical, and setting up a traditional flange sound is effortless. Kicking in a favourite fuzz or distortion pedal ramps up the harmonic content and really shows off the satisfying qualities of the Starlight. It sits in a very nice place in the mix too, always letting the drive retain its character without overpowering it.

Where it gets more interesting is with the last three settings. The two-step settings give a stuttered flange similar to the step settings on the Boss BF-3. They induce a rhythmic pulse to the signal and mean that you can play long held notes and let the effect do the work. I found the random setting particularly pleasing. The manual setting allows you static flanging, which gives that classic hollow-tiled room sound that I particularly like, to give pumping eighth-note grooves a bit of movement. You simple tune the flanger frequency using the speed knob.

Conclusion

This is set to be another classic from Subdecay. Once again, their ability to combine analogue circuits with digital controls succeeds where others fail. If I had one complaint about the DLX models I have tried, it is that they are so crammed full with features that it is easy to lose sight of what sound you were after in the first place. Perhaps this is not always a bad thing if you want to get experimental, but we aren't all in that position. Most of us want to achieve our desired sound as quickly as possible and carry on with the process of making music rather than getting bogged down in the technicalities. This is where the Starlight really excels. The speed with which you can dial in a great sound is impressive. That said, for such simple pedals there are still an awful lot of tonal options. I wonder if a DLX version might be around the corner, and what control options they could possibly add. I hope Subdecay continues with a whole line of Quantum series effects. If they do, I suspect that our bass-lines will become even more effects-laden and our wallets a lot emptier. ■

Availability

The Subdecay quantum Starlight is available in the UK via www.joespedals.com for £149.

Alternatives

Source Audio's Tri-Mod Flanger (£100) allows for a range of options, is well priced and sounds great. The EBS Unichorus (£170) is an industry-standard modulation box that offers Chorus, Phase and Flanger options. Conveniently sized and apparently bomb-proof, it is definitely worth a look. Those on a tight budget may prefer the Electro Harmonix Neo Mistress (£52), again a good size but with limited flanging options. The Boss BF-3 (£105) retains a keen following as a reliable pedal with many different sound options, including step and static flanging. Those who like discontinued or vintage stomps might like the BF-2B, or if you have slightly deeper pockets you might enjoy the fantastic Strymon Orbit (£249) or the insanely tweakable Moog MF108M Cluster Flux at £480.

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The FrontLine

Four career bassists bring you tales and tips from the world of professional bass playing, where necks warp, bridges rust and you're rarely at the top of any groupie's hit list

The Jazz Bassist

RUTH GOLLER

Ruth goes loco, and gets to jam with Macca and Jonesy

This summer I was lucky enough to spend a week on the Africa Express, a train containing about 80 musicians, which travelled around the UK promoting African music. Many of the artists were African, but the mixture of people was vast, and so was the music they brought with them. On the train there were chill-out areas, a rehearsal wagon and a restaurant bar, and in the daytime some of us would do pop-up gigs in different places, such as schools, offices or factories. Each evening we had a show in a different town. People would get together, on the train or elsewhere, and rehearse tunes or ideas they wanted to perform. Lots of collaborations came to the surface and musical styles got mixed up.

I especially remember one collaboration between a traditional Malian artist and a beat-boxer. I couldn't really imagine how that was going to sound, but it worked beautifully. It really made me feel that, when you spend time with people and get on well, it helps the music you create, and you can make almost anything work. I was on the train because I was performing with the amazing Malian singer Rokia Traoré, who is such an inspiration to me. I would urge everyone to go and see her live, because you rarely see an artist who is so at one with their music. Another great musician who I met on the train was Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones, who also plays keyboards, mandolin and other instruments. It was very exciting for me, as a big Zeppelin fan, to meet him, play together and talk to him. He is so open-minded and interested in every kind of music. He said to me that he just switches on the radio and plays along with anything that's on, and if it doesn't sound good, he will try to make it sound good. What a great way to practise! On top of that, Paul McCartney joined us at the last show in London, and I ended up sharing the stage with him and John Paul Jones for one song. It was a once in a lifetime moment for any bass player.

soundcloud.com/ruth-goller

The Metalhead

PAOLO GREGOLETTO

The Trivium bassist talks songwriting

My role as a writer in Trivium has increased more and more with each album. At this point, Corey Beaulieu, Matt Heafy and I have enough riffs and parts between us to write double albums each time we go into the studio. Obviously, we try to weed out anything that isn't up to par, but there's a constant state of creativity within our band. For me, however, there is a dichotomy between writing songs on guitar and writing bass parts for the other guys' songs.

I find that some of my best bass parts are found on songs that I haven't written. I've definitely written a few bass-oriented sections to songs, but as a writer I have excelled more with a guitar in my hands.

Though I've never had the inclination to be anything other then a bass player, I decided to pick up the guitar after I started playing in bands, as it had the potential to make me a more proficient songwriter. The similarities of a bass guitar and its six-string comrade are more than apparent, but writing on either instrument requires a very different approach, rather like two dialects of the same language. A good example of my writing with a guitarist's mindset is in our song 'To The Rats'. It's a bit of a thrasher, with fast alternate picking leading into a very up-tempo metal chorus, followed by a slamming middle section of droning triplet riffs. When recording this song's bass tracks, after having written it on guitar, I found that I lacked the space to stretch out and add more to the riff without cluttering it up. Don't get me wrong: the song is fun to play, but the bass plays a supportive role to the guitars.

On the other hand, my shining moment as a bass-playing songwriter comes on *The Crusade*'s bonus track 'Broken One'. The intro is played using the left hand to hammer on the chord progression, while the right hand is tapping out the melody on the G and D-strings. The melody guitar lines and drums are all written around the bass theme: a first for Trivium. The outro involves the same line and technique, but tapped to a different time and feel. Above that line are two bass parts playing a melody line utilising third harmonies. The two songs are very different in their mental approach to writing, but I love playing them both.

www.trivium.org

© Scott Uchida

The Alternative Rocker

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Therapy?'s bass wallah hails the greats

'Influences' can be a bit of a dirty word for musicians. Some of us don't want to admit to them, for fear of revealing why we sound the way we do, or because of the risk of being pigeonholed within a genre. But, consciously or unconsciously, influences make our playing and songwriting come out the way it does. I say let's embrace them – the more varied the better. Our influences could be the songs that our parents played in the house, nursery or church when we were young, the musicians we've played with, and, of course, the bands we've discovered and loved over the years. A musician is always picking up these little pointers and flavours as the years go on, and sometimes I find it a good exercise to look at something I like and try to put my own spin on it.

I consciously look for influences outside the genres of music Therapy? are normally associated with. There's a huge glut of bands doing noisy, melodic, punk-influenced metal, and I easily tire of listening to that kind of thing. We all know that dance music has been leading the way for years in the field of bass, from the Motown scene, through disco and funk, on to acid house, techno and drum'n'bass, right up to the crazy mutation that is dance music in 2012. There's always been an amazing focus on bottom end, groove, and trouser-flapping bass grunt. Obviously, trying to use your influences wisely and keeping them sounding natural is the challenge. There's no point in simply sticking a breakbeat under a rock tune. It has to be done in your style, with your feel, and it might only capture a general feeling or atmosphere of the original inspiration – but that's the whole point and a major part of the fun. An influence should be a subtle nod towards something you like, or feel an affinity with, filtered through your own warped set of abilities and interpretations. Be sure to cast your net wide, as the returns will be great, both for your playing and your general musical awareness.

www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

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The Extended-Range Specialist

STEWART MCKINSEY

Stu explains how to get to grips with all those intimidating strings

Greetings once again, extended-rangers. This time I'm writing about ERBs as solo instruments, and where they fit in the context of ensemble playing. There is a perception that these instruments only exist to function in the spotlight, squarely at centre-stage, or that they always have to take the most prominent place in a recording. The visual impact of large basses, and the personalities of many ERB players certainly contribute to this perception. And it's true that, with as many as six octaves of notes on the fingerboard alone, the ERB is a wonderful tool for a solo artist, allowing you to employ techniques like two-handed tapping and classical guitar-style fingerpicking. Combined with the chordal possibilities and technologies such as looping, the big basses are perfect for this arena.

But let's flip the coin and put the beast into a band context. First, and most obviously, look at all that neck. You can play a part in the same octave in numerous locations to explore the different timbres, or transpose a bass part into a different octave. You can use chords, sequencer-like arpeggios or sub-lows to create pedal tones like those of a pipe organ. You can play a melody, double a melody or create a counter-melody. The bass's scale, the size of the strings, the voicing of the pickups, and the amplification and speakers all contribute to the sonic possibilities in the context of a band. Now what about exploiting both of these worlds? Why can't an instrumentalist belong to a band, play solo in that outfit and/or perform as a solo act? There are things about playing in a group that will enrich one's solo performance, just as a good soloist can enhance the sound of an ensemble. All soloists should function in a group, just as everyone who is normally part of a collective ought to explore the realm of the solo. These endeavours promote a better understanding of one's instrument, just as they should open one's ideas of what a group is, and what music is. What we do is ultimately about communication, and communication is always bettered through understanding. It's so easy to think of what we do in the limited context of what our instrument typically or traditionally does, but music can be about thinking outside of the box... or even about building new boxes!

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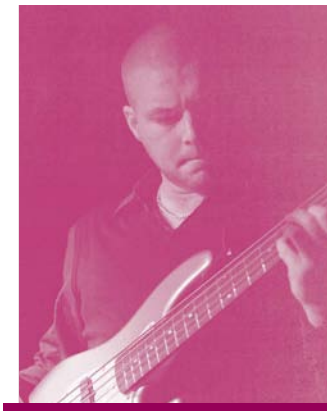


JACK STEVENS

Jack Stevens is a bass player, songwriter, producer and teacher. He graduated from Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts in 2005 and has gone on to play bass with the likes of Frankmusik, Natasha Hamilton, Craig David and Simon Webbe. He is currently working with Dr. Dijon, Chris McDonald and Shane Beales.

www.jackstevensbass.com

JACK STEVENS

BEGINNING BASS

Scale away with Jack in the third instalment of our new beginners' column

In this month's column we're going to be looking at the major scale and how it fits in with our exploration into the fundamentals of bass playing. As I always say to my students, not only does the major scale aid in developing economy of movement (in other words, getting around the fingerboard without too much hard work), but it also helps us to understand how an array of musical ideas work both melodically and tonally.

Firstly, what is the major scale and how can it be of use to us? Well, if you aren't familiar with this term – and there's no shame in admitting it – I'd be surprised if you didn't recognise the sound of this scale. The first six notes of the infamous *Eastenders* theme tune are also the first 6 notes – ascending – of an Eb-major scale. In fact, the whole melody is constructed upon that same pool of notes.

You probably also know 'My Baby Just Cares For Me' by Nina Simone. If you can sing that opening bass-line, then you can effectively sing most of a descending major scale. The same can be said for the chorus bass-line of the Jackson Five's classic 'I Want You Back'. The major 7th interval of this scale can also be heard in full effect in British soul legend Omar's 'There's Nothing Like This'.

An old, but useful, explanation of this scale is that, if you play from any C note on a piano keyboard up to the next available one, using only the white keys, you'll have played the major scale. Very simply, a scale is a sequence of notes made up of a specific order of intervals, known as tones and semi-tones. Moving up a bass neck, fret by fret, is the same as moving semi-tone by semi-tone (commonly referred to as 'chromatically'). The major scales are constructed of seven notes, with the eighth note (the octave) being the point in which the pattern begins again. The major scale is also known as the Ionian mode.

A major scale can start on any note, but must follow the same construction of intervals for it to be 'major'. In terms of tones and semi-tones, this would be tone, tone, semi-tone, tone, tone, tone, semi-tone. Each note of any scale has its own characteristics. The major scales are root, major 2nd, major 3rd, perfect 4th, perfect 5th, major 6th and major 7th.

Diagram time! *Figure 1* is our C major scale. We can play this in more than one position, but we'll start here for now. Take note of the suggested fingerings above each note position. Try playing this scale while alternating your right-hand fingers: index followed by middle finger and so forth (do it slowly!). If this is a bit of a struggle, take exactly the same pattern and begin on the 8th fret of the E string. This particular fingering pattern is one of the more versatile of the one-octave major scale shapes, and can be moved as desired as long as you start on the E or A strings. Figures *2* and *3* show the slight variations that you'll need for playing this scale starting on either the open E or A strings, or their respective first frets (F major and Bb major).

Have fun, and I'll see you next month!

Bass neck

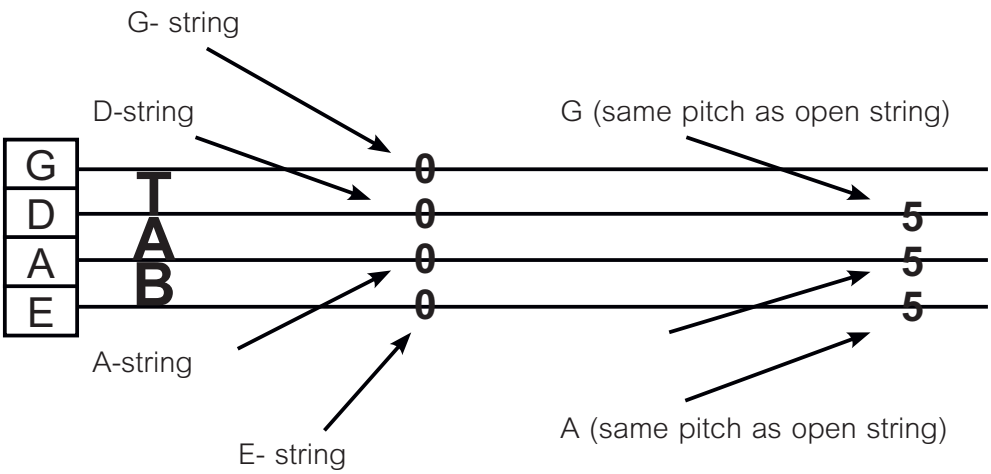
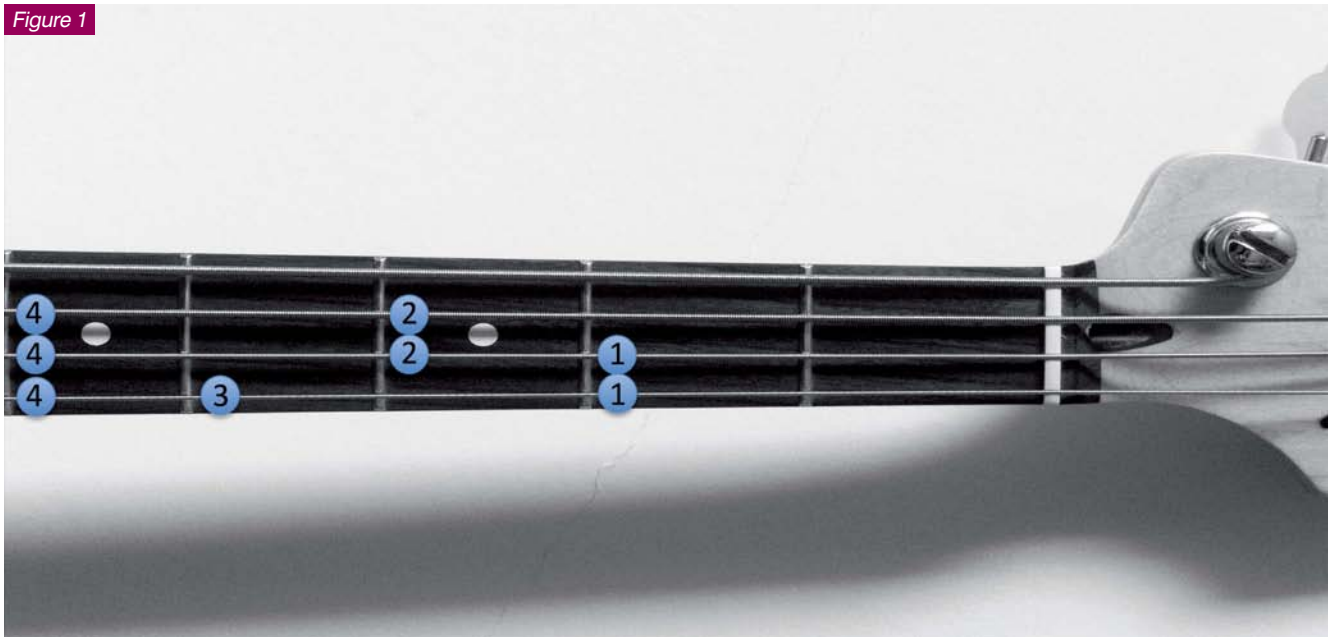


Figure 1



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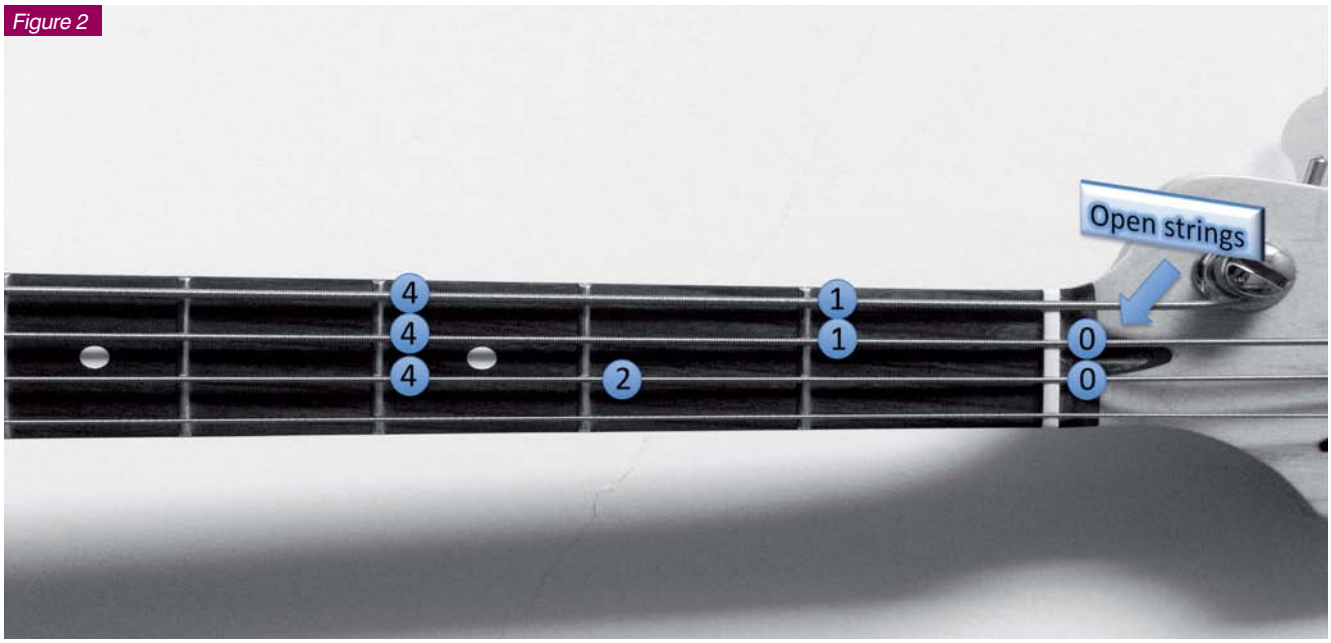
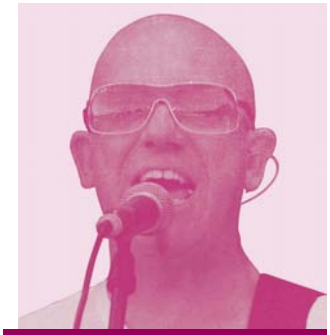


Figure 3



Paul Geary

Paul Geary graduated with honours from both Berklee College of Music in Boston and the Musician's Institute of Technology in Los Angeles. He is one of the UK's foremost studio bassists, an active session musician and musical director. He has recorded and toured with artists including George Michael, Simply Red, Chris Rea, Nik Kershaw, Donny and Marie Osmond, The Lighthouse Family, Liberty X, Geri Halliwell, Sophie Ellis Bextor, Rachel Stevens, Mary J. Blige and Westlife. As well as this, he still finds time to head up the Academy Of Contemporary Music's bass school.

Contact Paul at paulmarkgeary@googlemail.com and visit www.paulgeary.com for more information.

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PG'S TIPS

Paul Geary, session master and bass guru at the Academy of Contemporary Music, talks chords – vocal cords…

When I was studying bass at the Musicians' Institute Of Technology in California, one of my professors asked the whole class how many singers we had. Hardly any hands went up. This didn't go down too well. It was a bass course after all; 'I don't need to be able to sing,' I thought. How wrong could I have been?

The fact is, when you go into any teaching facility to study your discipline, whether it's bass, guitar, drums, voice, music production or keyboards, it's important to understand that you want to graduate as a rounded musician: it's not just about being a good bass player. I've found it very valuable over the years to be able to play a little keyboards, guitar and drums, albeit at a basic level. Of all the extra skills I've learnt, being able to sing has been the most important tool.

Learning to play other instruments helps you to understand where to put the bass within songs, because it makes you think about the spaces that other instruments create. It also helps when you have to instruct a guitarist or drummer as a music director. You don't want to be a jack of all trades, master of none, but understanding other instruments – especially the voice – can make you a better bass player and, most importantly, get you the gig. In general, the bass player who can do backing vocals will always win out over the bass player who can't.

Some gigs I've had to do have involved not only singing but playing synth bass on keyboards. A few years ago I was playing for a boy band called Another Level, and shortly after that another called A1. Both gigs consisted of about 80 percent synth bass and 20 percent bass guitar. You can always get a MIDI pickup for your bass guitar, but it won't feel or sound the same. Learn the line on keys: sometimes it's the only way to truly reproduce a song. At first, try singing over simple eighth-note rhythms. Then try basic syncopation. This will be the start of a whole new area of playing.

Bass will always be the hardest instrument to sing with. More often than not you have to play something completely different to the melody, and then you need to be able to sing across the rhythm. It's far easier to strum a guitar and sing, but once you start to do this with bass, you'll want to do it more and more.

I cut my teeth in working men's clubs in the north. I've come to look upon those dates as my apprenticeship. In these situations, you really start to grow. I remember one night in Grimethorpe, when I was getting ready to go on stage, all I could hear was shouting, whooping and the odd breaking glass, from the audience out front. I was scared! The entrance to the stage from the dressing room was a large staircase and at the top there was a big archway. Just before you emerged in front of the audience, on the arch above your head was some graffiti of a huge lion with its jaws open. The words 'Christians this way' had been crossed out, replaced with 'band this way'. The last band to play here had obviously drawn a comparison with the Romans leading the slaves out to be fed to the lions… just what you want to see before you kick into 'Midnight Hour'.

If I hadn't been singing that night, the crowd would have swallowed me up for sure. The band at the time was a simple four-piece, so it was all hands on deck to help out with singing. Another important factor, of course, is that if all of the band-members can sing, your band can stay small – and obviously there will be more money to go around at the end of the night.

Try these simple vocal tips, courtesy of voice coach Sarah Geary.

Breathe

It's important to keep a steady flow of air and let your breathing respond naturally to the words you are about to sing. Breathe in and out over counts of 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Breathing must be continuous, like a spinning wheel. Only pause between breaths if you need to, never during them.

Lip Trills

Place your lips together and imitate the sound of a car engine revving up. Try a silent breath, then a single pitch. You can also try this with your bass. Once you have this down, move up a scale. Experiment with the sound from high to low, low to high, then softer, louder, slower and faster. Remember to keep the 'brrr' sound going all the time.

Vowels

Try singing pitches to the vowel sounds 'Ah', 'Oo' and 'Ee', taking each vowel in turn. Hold each note for a count of four before moving onto the next tone. Aim to keep the note true and keep breathing throughout. How does it sound? What's the tone like?

Give it a go… You know you want to! Once you start, you won't be able to stop. Enjoy being a complete musician. Next time, we're going to take a look at some basic blues.

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A member of the Institute's visiting bass faculty, Janek is a solo recording artist, musical director for Capitol recording artist VV Brown, and sideman to the likes of Mike Stern, Randy Brecker, Delta Goodrem, Airto and Pat Metheny.
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JANEK GWIZDALA

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

Bass guru Gwizdala sets the bar

I think the question I probably get asked the most is 'What should I work on to be a better bass player and musician?' The day I wrote this I was asked it repeatedly via email, at forums and by students, so I thought it would make a great topic for a column. I want to try and put a few myths to sleep by explaining a couple of things that have been a part of my process for many years.

I first picked up a bass when I was about 16, and having come from a background in classical guitar, I had already learned a few key things about practising, and how to make the most of my practice time. The basic technique to playing a fretted, stringed instrument translated pretty well from classical guitar to bass, so my initial thought was not to change much at all in terms of my basic technique practice routines. They consisted of the obligatory slew of scales and arpeggio exercises – many of which I've published in the column over the past few years – but just as important was the way in which they were practised.

I've always been taught to relax, breathe normally and not strain any muscles anywhere in my body, while maintaining correct posture while playing. Of course, most of that goes out of the window when you're onstage rocking out, your amp's about to explode, and there are three attractive members of the opposite sex in the front row making eyes at you. But doing all of these things in my practice routine at home, away from the bandstand, set me up to do minimal damage to myself when I got caught up in the moment and forgot all about what was 'right' when playing live.

There are two things I'd like you to make a note of here.

■ There is no 'right' way to do anything. If you produce the best music from your instrument while playing with one hand and standing on your head, then that is what's right for you. Personally I like the 'two feet on the floor' method myself, but that's just me…

■ Some of the best music and freshest ideas I've ever come up with have been when I've been doing everything completely 'wrong'. Bad posture, sloppy technique, forgetting the songs, missing cues, being late for a gig. So the first thing I want you to think about when it comes to your own practice routine is your comfort level and personal awareness. Just knowing your limits in terms of the amount of time you can handle playing continuously is huge. If your threshold is 40 minutes before you need a break, then you need to practise in 40-minute bursts rather than playing for two hours. You'll be wasting the hour and 20 minutes that aren't in your capability range. I know world-famous pros who rarely practise and sound incredible, as well as players who woodshed many hours a day. Again, it's all personal, and the sooner you become aware of your own capabilities, the more efficient your practising is going to become.

> "IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ALL SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS, IT CAN BE THE EXACT MATERIAL YOU'RE TRYING TO LEARN FROM RECORDS"

The next most important thing for any practice routine is to work on material that inspires you to want to learn. There's nothing worse than a teacher forcing you to work on something when you hate it. It's far better if the teacher understands where your tastes and interests lie, and then tailor the material to suit you. You don't really need a teacher for that. You know what you like, and you're more than capable of finding that music and listening to it for hours on end. The real learning and connection comes when you feel the motivation to work out some of the things that you're listening to and play them yourself. Don't dive in at the deep end with some complex Frank Zappa music that might take months to learn, even with the sheet music: go for something a little simpler to start training your ear. You're going to find so much repetition in music and it will soon start to make way more sense than it does right now. Like anything else, the more you listen, the more you transcribe, and the more you try and play ideas on your instrument, the more fluent you're going to get. To me, there is nothing more important than listening.

Once you start taking ideas from songs, you're going to have exercises, shapes, patterns, licks, fragments and all kinds of things to fill the technique category of your practice routine. It doesn't have to be all scales and arpeggios, it can be the exact material you're trying to learn from records. Make sure you're slowing everything down when you figure out what it is. The better you can play something slow, the easier it's going to be to play it fast. It's like trumpet players who can play incredibly high: they have immense control and ability to play lower than you ever imagined was possible with that little brass instrument.

So, here are the things I think you should be conscious of when practising and working on music.

Be relaxed

There's no need to rush anything or let anything fluster or overtake you. You're in control. Breathe normally, as if you're reading a book or doing anything else totally natural to you.

Posture

It's important not to get into bad habits if you can avoid it. You'll stay injury-free for longer, and build the strength to rehearse or play live for hours.

Be inspired

It's really important to work on music that inspires you. Don't just do it for the hell of it, or because someone else told you to do it.

Take it slow

Playing better slower means being able to play faster easier. Use a metronome if necessary to give yourself some discipline with practice tempos.

Write things down

You might think you can remember lots of the stuff you've learned from records, but after a while that information starts running away from you just as fast as it arrived. If you can notate or write ideas down, do it. You'll have an amazing archive of practice material to delve into and be re-inspired to work on music.

Have fun

As soon as it stops being fun, take a break. Put down the instrument and go and do something totally different. It might take a few minutes to clear your head, or a few days to get inspired again. Whatever it takes, don't be afraid to take a break.

Happy practising, and good luck with whatever you're currently working on!

ANDREW MCKINNEY

TUITION TIP: GUITAR ON BASS

Guitarist Interview: Les Davidson

Andrew McKinney

Andrew is the Head Of Bass at Tech Music School in London and plays with the renowned James Taylor Quartet.

For the full Tuition Tip archive, including sound files and videos, visit Andrew's teacher profile at www.techmusicschool.co.uk. In every issue of this magazine, Andrew features a different class taught at the School, giving you a bite-size chunk of the lesson and an insight into his course.

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Tech MUSIC SCHOOL

When we're looking to improve as bass players, it's good to get some input from our guitar-playing brothers and sisters. Though there are many important differences between our instruments, there are also plenty of similarities, so it's worth dropping guitarists a line now and then, to see what they have to say about bass. This month, I was fortunate enough to have a very experienced voice on the end of the line in the form of Les Davidson. Les has been touring the world and gracing studios for over 30 years now, with artists such as Leo Sayer, Joan Armatrading, Paul Rogers, Dizzee Rascal and Pete Townshend, to name but a few.

At Tech Music School, Les gets involved in all aspects of the courses, from sight-reading to performance workshops, and uses his relaxed and encouraging manner to restore many a fragile guitarist's ego. Although bass players are generally a more grounded bunch, we still need a little gentle cajoling from time to time, and Les is a master on this front. One day at TMS, I sat down and let his soft Scottish accent restore and revitalise me, as he related his views on the bass world…

What are the qualities you value most in a bass player?
Time, feel and locking in with the drummer are the most important things. Take Andy Fraser when he was playing with Free. He was so economical as a bass player; when he came in, he locked in with the drums and everything he played was perfect. It was arranged so beautifully – you didn't want to change it. He was my benchmark as a young musician, because he was one of the first bass players I really got into, along with Jack Bruce and Paul McCartney. They were all very musical; they understood space and playing with the drums, and it was all about feel.

I also look for bass players who turn up on time! If a musician turns up before the start of a gig or a session, I see enthusiasm for playing. If I send somebody PDFs of the charts and they've prepared them, so that when they play it feels like they already know the stuff, then that makes me want to work with them again. I look for people that simply have joy for playing music – whatever style it is. To me that's more important than anything else in the bigger picture.

Who are your favourite bass players to work with, and why?
Three bass players that spring to mind are Laurence Cottle, Steve Pearce, and a Sheffield-based guy called Jeremy Meek. I've worked with them a lot over the years. They've all got chops, but they bring time and space to the music.

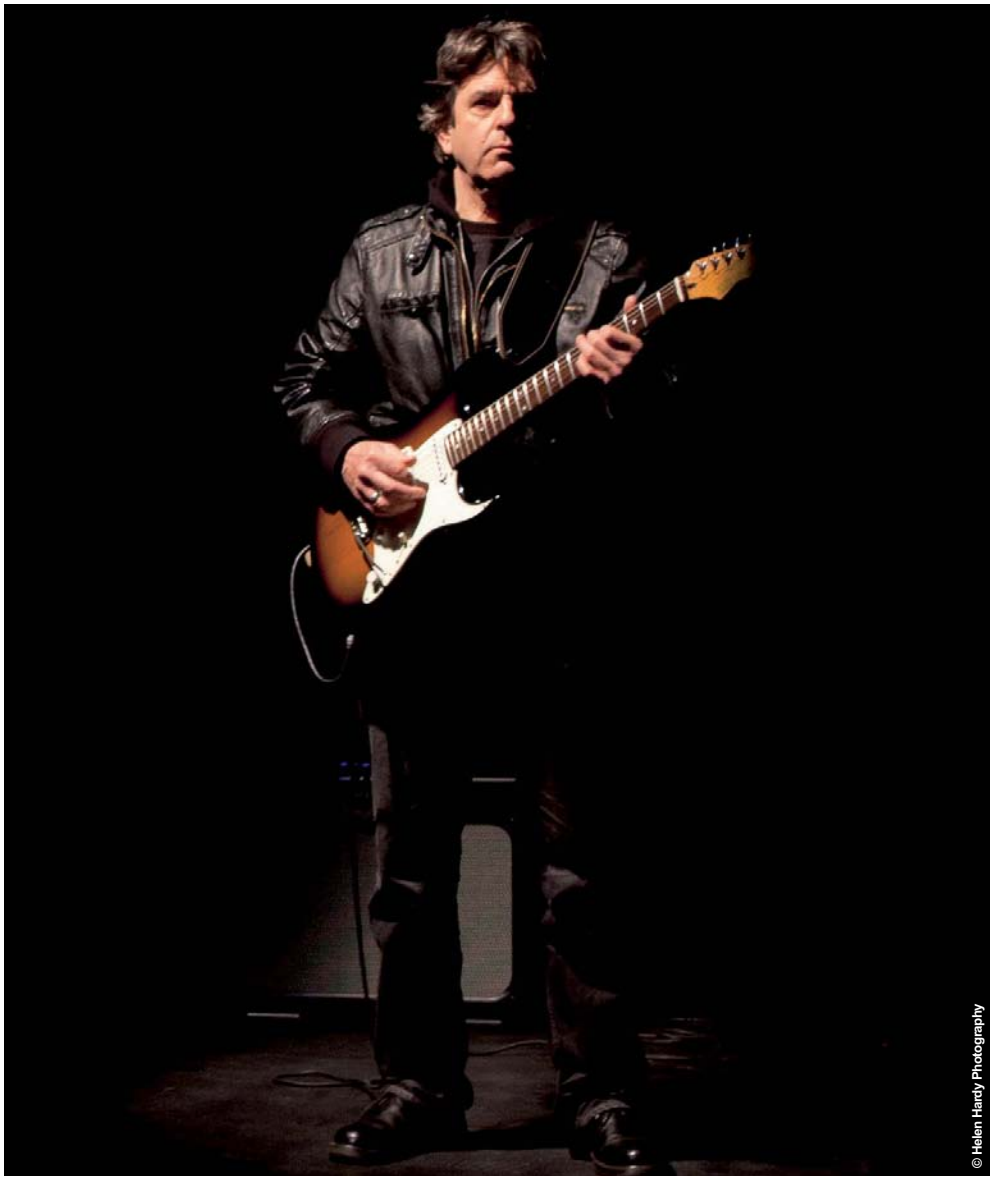
I work with Laurie in situations where he's all over the neck, and I've also worked with Laurie in situations where he plays two notes per bar. He smiles when he's playing two notes, and when he's playing a thousand!

Steve is an incredibly well-rounded musician and a fantastic reader. So good, in fact, that if I have any questions about a score or chart, I'll ask him what the hell's going on. He's on top of all that, but completely without an ego. That's a quality I look for in other musicians – not being egotistical with things like that. We're all at a level, I hope, where we can be generous to each other, and Steve's incredibly generous.

I worked with Jeremy on two world tours with Joan Armatrading. Jeremy worked with different drummers on both of those tours, yet he managed to solidify the rhythm section and make it really work for the material. He always had that big fat bottom end to his sound – sometimes on a five-string, sometimes not. Also, when he would solo he would do it in a very economical way that was just right for the gig. It was a rock gig, so he didn't suddenly go, 'Hey, I'm Jaco', because in many ways that would have been wrong. He plays what is harmonically right and keeps everything solid.

In your opinion, what are the most common things bass players get wrong?
If you haven't got good time and you don't understand space, then that's a real problem. The biggest mistake any musician can make is not listening to the other players. Sometimes in live situations you can't always hear all of the other players, but you still need to fit in and not overplay. If you're not listening, you're going to stick out like a sore thumb – it will be really obvious. For people starting out, it's an inevitable mistake, because they're so obsessed with what they're doing, and trying to get it right. They don't have that confidence that comes with ability and experience. Once you get that, you're able to listen more because you're not so worried about making the actual notes.

Not that long ago I was depping on a gig with Rumer. I was half-reading charts and half-knew the stuff, with the charts on



stage as a safety net. I was going through a couple of things and just warming up at the soundcheck, and the MD Steve shouted over, 'It's too late, Les', which is a great statement, and he was perfectly right – I was playing when I should have shut up! Even I make those mistakes after all these years, and that's just me being a little bit nervous. Remember, sometimes it's good just to shut up.

Who are the bass players you would most like to play with and why?

Willie Dixon is one. To me, he's a 'dirty' double bass player. He understands playing dirty blues. There aren't too many bass players from that era who were clearly very musical, and he was a great composer as well. The simplicity of his riffs and their dirtiness really struck me when I was first listening to early blues music, and I don't think I was even aware that it was double bass to start with. I like that rasp that he produced playing with people like Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, and Don Covay.

I also like Ray Brown if we're talking jazz. When I was a young guy and I used to get lessons from a jazz guitar player, he would turn me on to all these records. I remember when I heard records with Ray Brown on them, the bass, whether he played a solo or not, seemed to be as perfect as it could be. Even for me, at that early stage when I didn't necessarily understand what he was doing, it still got me emotionally, and that was the most important thing.

And then there's Jaco. I heard the first solo album when it came out in 1976 and it blew my mind: he completely rewrote the book for bass players. Also, he was playing fretless bass, so he had that rasp that Willie Dixon and Ray Brown would have. Musicality was oozing out of the guy. He was brought up in Florida so he was surrounded by every type of music, and he was open to all of it.

Last but not least – Carol Kaye. I didn't even realise it was a woman playing bass on the Tamla Motown stuff. When I discovered it was a woman I thought it was brilliant – bass had always been the preserve of men, but here was a young woman being booked by all the top people and sounding incredible with such a great groove. All of these bass players had a voice of their own and seem to have emerged from the ether – coming up with a whole new style that was extraordinary and completely new.

What are your favourite bass-lines and what is it you like about them?

I love Lee Sklar's bass-line on 'Stratus' from the Billy Cobham album *Spectrum*. It's so hypnotic and such a fantastic groove. At first I didn't realise it was Lee – I knew of him from playing with James Taylor. That riff has been used so many times now; it's become a riff with a life of its own. I love 'Teen Town' by Jaco. When I first heard it I thought, 'I wish I could do that on guitar, let alone bass', and he composed it as well. The whole thing was extraordinary.

My last vote would be for James Jamerson, and particularly the triplet-swing thing that he would put in on tracks like 'How Sweet It Is'. When I was a kid standing in the Top Rank club in Edinburgh, we used to get a lot of Tamla Motown and Stax records played. The merchant seamen used to bring them over from the States and we'd get to hear the latest records that had only just come out in America. I had no idea it was James Jamerson, I just knew I really loved what was going on.

What things do you think bass players should practise?

I think something a lot of people don't do is practise arpeggios. A good way of doing that is around the cycle of fourths. I think young bass players tend to be locked into playing riffs and don't think about the bigger picture harmonically. This sort of practice can be great for that. Focus on using the major, minor, dominant, diminished and augmented arpeggios round the cycle of fourths. This will unlock the fretboard and tune your ear into these important sounds.

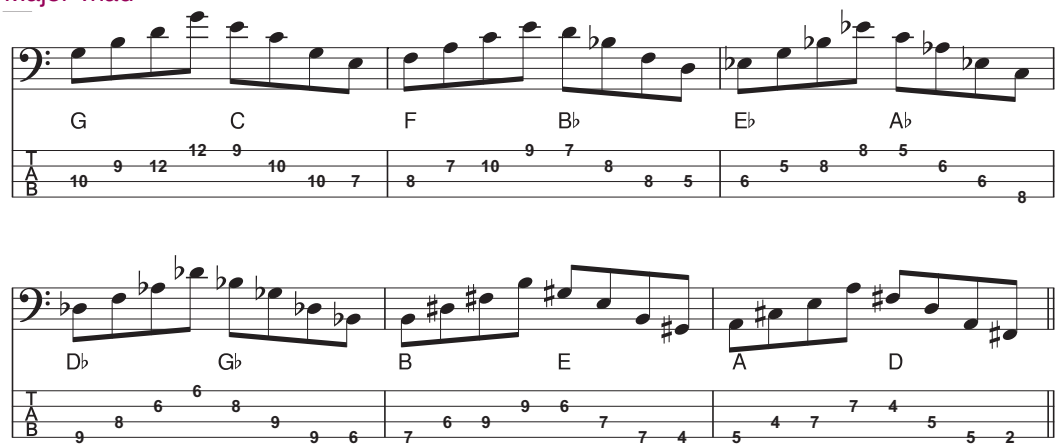
I'll be interviewing various different musicians over the next few issues – let me what you think or if there's anything particular you would like to see! andrew.mckinney@techmusicschool.co.uk, www.andrewmckinney.co.uk

Exercises

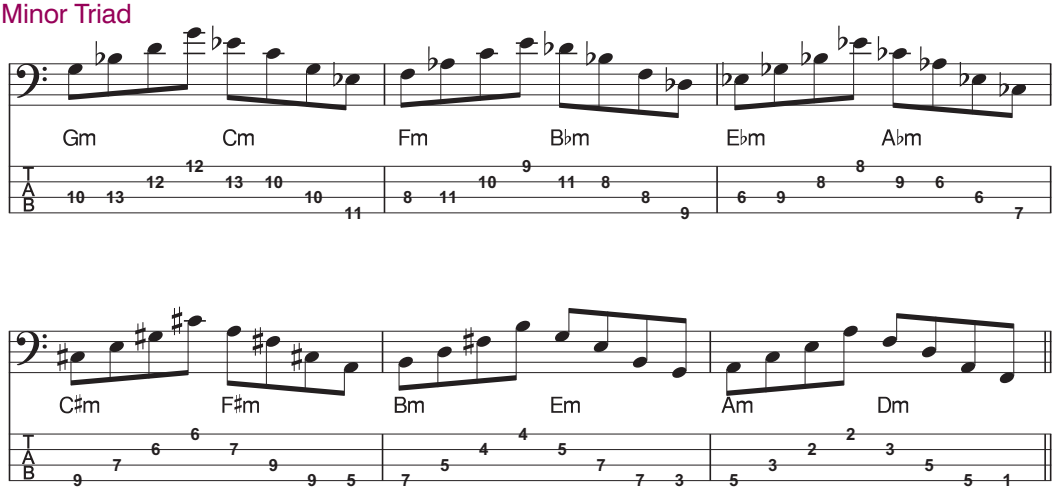
Here are some arpeggio exercises that Les shared with me, designed to improve your fretboard knowledge, and your technique. Arpeggios place a big demand on our fretting hand accuracy and our string crossing, so it's always worth including some arpeggios in your practice routine.

Exercise One

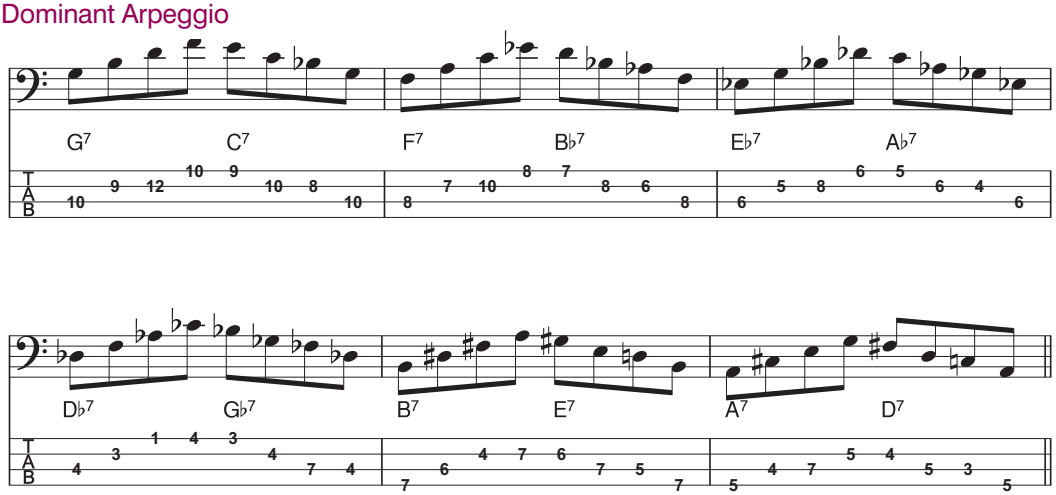
This exercise goes round the cycle of fourths, ascending one triad in root position, and then descending the next one in first inversion (from the third). It will take you all over the neck – the tab is just one suggestion for the fingering. Feel free to find your own positions in which to play this exercise – the more positions you get fluent with, the better!

Major Triad

Exercise Two

This exercise takes the same concept, but applies it to a minor triad. Up a root position minor triad and then down a first inversion.

Minor Triad

Exercise Three

Finally, this exercise uses a dominant 7 arpeggio. Again, experiment with different positions and inversions, and then apply this concept to diminished and augmented arpeggios as well – have fun!

Dominant Arpeggio

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DAVID ETHERIDGE

UPRIGHT CITIZEN

Part three of our brand-new column for bassists interested in giving the upright bass a go. This month, David Etheridge gets a bit handy…

David Etheridge

David Etheridge studied double bass at the Royal College of Music. His first gig on leaving was a tour with jazz legend Stephane Grappelli. Since then he's worked in a wide range of musical idioms, with musicians as diverse as Diz Disley, Nigel Kennedy, Martin Taylor, Rod Argent, Peter Skellern, Gary Brooker, Graeme Edge and Robin Lumley, as well as acts ranging from the Ballet Rambert to Frank Carson and Bob Monkhouse. He was the resident bassist at the Cambridge Folk Festival for several years in the 1970s. David currently teaches double and electric bass in the Midlands and is the MD of two big bands and a 55-piece jazz orchestra.

Newcomers will quickly discover that playing an upright is all about hand stretching. It takes a lot of work, even compared to a long-scale electric bass. I've seen pictures of players with quite awful left-hand techniques, which makes playing problematic at best. I'll admit I used to have a terrible left-hand technique myself! It wasn't until I got to music college that it started to improve.

So what's the key? Essentially, it's muscle memory. Use your hands in the correct way (which is actually the easiest way), and things become much more simple. The left hand has to do all the movement up and down the neck and across the strings. Your standard flat fingers, barred across the neck on a fretted bass, will no longer cut it – even though John Entwistle made a career of this, and it didn't do him any harm. The tension on upright bass strings can be a couple of tonnes per square inch across the bridge contact point, so you'll need to look at curving the fingers in such a way as to get the maximum pressure at the contact point.

Raise that elbow and get your wrist angle right, or risk overstraining your hand

The view from the side: notice the thumb almost opposite the second finger

Playing the bottom string: notice how the hand is raised for extra force through the fingers

Avoid the drowning man's death grip!

What we're going to do first is raise the elbow slightly and push the forearm forward to bring the palm of the hand over the top of the strings. You'll bend your wrist to assist this. Now curve your fingers around slightly, so that the fleshy parts of the tips are in contact with the strings. This approach maximises the force pressing on the string at the contact point, and uses less energy than the customary beginner's flat-fingered approach as you've got the weight of the palm of the hand and forearm helping to press the string down. If you also lean forward over the top shoulders of the bass, that can bring energy from the top part of the body through the arms and hands to help press the strings down and make your playing even easier, as well as giving better control of dynamics. Try to avoid sitting away from the bass, as though you'd discovered the smell of something dead inside the body. I've seen some classical players who do that, and they seem to be incapable of forceful playing as a result.

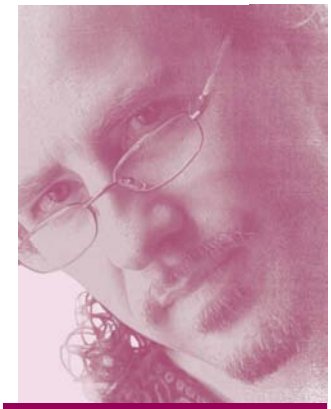
While all this is going on, what's the thumb doing? Many bass methods recommend placing the thumb in the middle of the neck, which is fine, but I've found over the years that if you move it slightly over to the left, particularly while playing the lower strings, you'll get more leverage with the fingers when pressing down. Once again, it's actually easier, it uses less energy and you can play for longer without strain.

Beginners tend to have the 'drowning man's death grip' on the neck when they start studying the bass, particularly if they are standing up to play and the left hand is also having to hold the bass up. This makes for a hard time playing, and position shifts will also be energy intensive. With the hand shape described, the thumb's pressure on the back of the neck is actually quite light, letting you whiz up and down through the positions with ease.

FRANC O'SHEA

BASS BEYOND

Franc goes for a last-minute substitution... and scores



Franc O'Shea

Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Brighton, Franc has worked with Steve Howe (Yes), Lisa Moorish, and Mike Lindup (Level 42). Described by *Bass Guitar Magazine* as 'the most musical of virtuoso bassists', Franc has also produced two solo albums. His most recent album, *Alkimia*, features Flamenco and Jazz legends Jorge Pardo and Rubem Dantas from Chick Corea's and Paco de Lucia's bands. Franc uses Jeff Chapman basses and Elites strings.
www.francoshea.com

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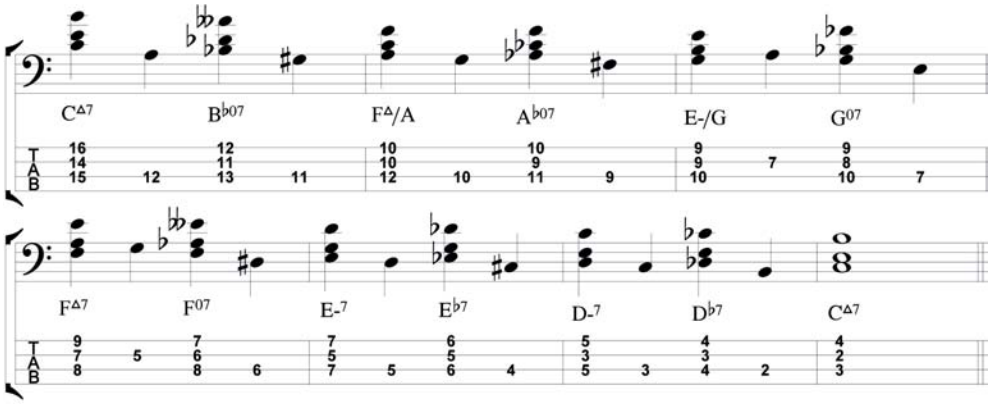
MUSIC EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

This month I will be continuing my series on walking bass-lines by looking at building lines using chord substitutions. I will be using the same Imaj7 VI7 IImin7 V7 sequence in C major that I have been using as an example sequence in my previous columns on walking. In *BGM 54* and *55*, I provided an in-depth look at chord substitution for this very sequence. I will be using these ideas here for building walking lines.

Example 1

Example 1 shows how a walking bass-line could be built using a substitute sequence for a Imaj7 VI7 IImin7 V7 progression with two chords per bar. This is the same sequence as used in *example 3* of *BGM 55*. I have written the chords on beats one and three for clarity so that you can clearly see what is going on, but you can sustain them for a full two beats each if you want. The walking line appears as the lowest note on all four crotchets of each bar. There are two exceptions, however, as the root notes for the chords in bars three and four are the same on beats one and three – Emin/G to Gdim7 in bar three, and Fmaj7 to Fdim7 in bar four.

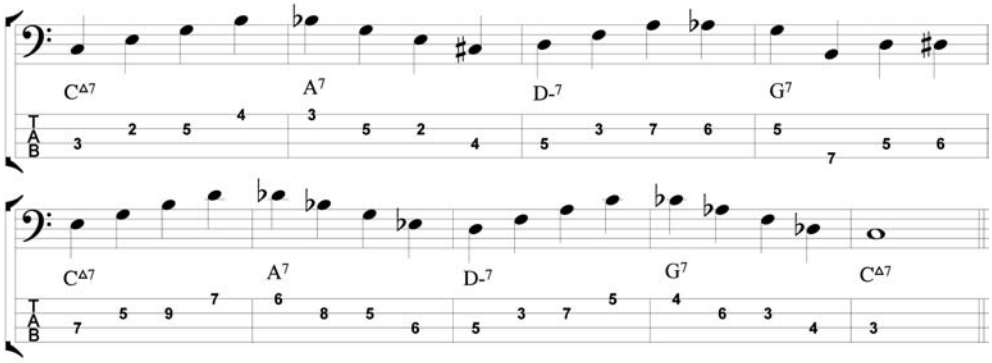
In this case I target the minor 3rd of both the diminished 7th chords (Gdim7 and Fdim7) to keep the musical flow of the line rather than coming straight back to the root. The line itself uses a formula by going from the root of the chords on the downbeats (beats one and three) to a chromatic leading note a semitone below the root of the next chord on the offbeats (beats two and three), which in turn leads to the next root note and the process carries on. The only deviation to this pattern is the minor 3rds of the diminished chords on the third beats of bars three and four as mentioned above.

These minor 3rds are approached from a semitone below though, following the same pattern as the rest of the line. As I mentioned before, the sequence itself just repeats the Imaj7 VI7 IImin7 V7 progression, but uses substitutions to create variation. We start with chord Imaj7 (Cmaj7), but this leads to a Bbdim7 chord on beat 3, which acts as a substitution for the A7 chord that would usually appear at this position in the sequence. The notes of the Bbdim7 chord are Bb, Db, Fb, and Abb (the voicing on the bass in this example leaves the b5th out). The A7 is comprised of A, C# (the enharmonic equivalent of Db), E (same as Fb), and G (same as Abb). So the two chords share three notes, the C#, E and the G, which is why the Bbdim7 works as a substitute for the A7 chord. A7 is also a tension chord whose 3rd (C#) acts as a leading note to the root of the next chord, normally Dmin7 in the sequence. Since A is the 5th of Dmin7, Bb can be used instead (or with it, creating an A7b9 chord) so that more tension is created and subsequently released when the Bb resolves down a semitone to the A.

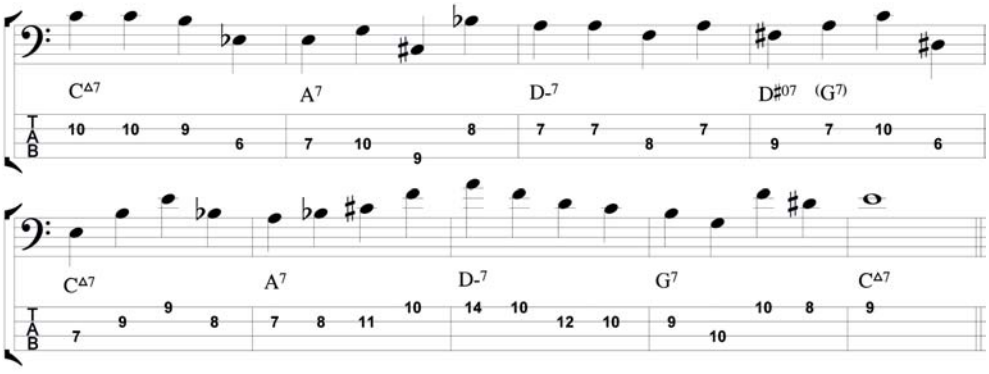
Some of you might be wondering why a bassist should bother understanding how substitutions work, but remember you will not only gain a deeper understanding of the music as a whole, but you will also have more ideas to draw from when creating your walking lines. The next chord in the sequence, Fmaj with an A in the bass, is a substitute for what would normally be a Dmin7 chord. The notes are A, C and F, which are also the minor 3rd, perfect 5th and minor 7th of a Dmin7 chord, which is why it works as a substitute. On beat three of the second bar we have an Abdim7 chord as a substitution for G7. This works harmonically in exactly the same way as the previous diminished 7th chord. The Ab moves down a semitone to resolve at the G, which is the 5th of the Cmaj7 that would be coming up in the next bar. In bar three, however, a substitution is used for the Cmaj7. This is an Emin with a G in the bass (the G is the lowest note). The notes of Emin/G are G, B and E, which are the 5th, the major 7th and the major 3rd of the Cmaj7 chord respectively.

Next we have a Gdim7 as a substitution for A7. This is not so unusual, as the interval structure of diminished 7th chords is symmetrical. Previously in the first bar, I used a Bbdim7 as a substitute for A7. But since diminished 7th chords are built consistently of minor 3rds from one chord note to the next, any inversion of a diminished 7th chord will essentially be the same chord. In the example presented here we have Bbdim7, which consists of the notes Bb, C#, E and G (I'm using enharmonic equivalents for convenience) but the notes of Gdim7 are G, Bb, C# and E, exactly the same notes as Bbdim7, which is why it works as a substitution. In bar four, we have an Fmaj7 chord as a substitution for the Dmin7 chord. The Fmaj7 has the notes F, A and C in common with Dmin7, and the major 7th of F, which is the note E, would be like adding an upper extension to create Dmin9. On beat three of the fourth bar there is an Fdim7 chord. This works as a substitution for the G7 chord in exactly the same way as the Abdim7 worked for the G7 on the third beat of the second bar. This is because Abdim7 and Gdim7 are synonymous as they share the same notes, Ab, B, D and G.

It is interesting to note that, since there are only 12 semitones in the Western music system, there are essentially only three diminished 7th chords, since through their synonyms they fall into three groups with four chords in each (3 x 4 = 12). On the first beat of bar five we have an Emin7 chord which acts as a substitute for Cmaj7, since it has three notes in common with it. On the third beat of bar 5 we have an Eb7 chord, which is a tritone substitution for what would normally be an A7. A7 comprises the notes A, C#, E and G, whereas Eb7 comprised an Eb, G, Ab and C# (Db). The A7 shares the notes G and C# with the Eb7 chord, and the roles of the 3rd (C#) and the b7th (G) of the A7 chord reverse themselves when they are used in the Eb7 chord, as the 3rd of Eb7 is the G, and its b7th is the C# (Db). In bar six we reach an un-substituted Dmin7 chord but there is another tritone substitution on the third beat of the bar. This is a Db7 which substitutes for G7 before we finally reach the tonic chord, Cmaj7, in the final bar of the sequence.

Example 2

In *example 2* I demonstrate a walking idea using substitutions that has only one chord per bar, but still uses the same Imaj7 VI7 IImin7 V7 progression. It starts out in the first bar by ascending a Cmaj7 arpeggio before reaching the second bar, where the line descends a C#dim7 arpeggio from the bb7 to the b5 to the b3rd to its root. The C#dim7 is a substitution for A7: it shares all of its notes apart from the A and it also includes a Bb. This diminished substitution works in exactly the same way as the Bbdim7 substitute worked on the 3rd beat of the first bar in *example 1*, as Bbdim7 and C#dim7 are synonymous. The line finishes its diminished decent on a C# on beat four of the second bar, which leads smoothly up a semitone to hit the root of the Dmin7 chord in the third bar.

For bars three and four, a root, 3rd, 5th chromatic leading note pattern is used with no substitutions employed until bar five. In the fifth bar an Emin7 arpeggio is substituted for the usual Cmaj7 as it shares three notes, E, G, and B. Its final note is a D, which leads nicely down a semitone to the first note of the next line. This note is a Db, which is the b7th of an Eb7 chord. The line carries on to outline the Eb7 chord in bar six, which is a tritone substitution for the usual A7, by descending its arpeggio. The same process happens in the next two bars, up a min7th arpeggio and down a dominant 7th arpeggio before finally landing on the root of the key in bar nine.

Example 3

Example 3 demonstrates some more adventurous and involved ideas. The line starts out by highlighting the root and the 7th of the Cmaj7 chord before using a chromatic approach note on the to link to the first note in the second bar. We once again see a diminished 7th chord as a substitute for the A7 in bar two, which leads smoothly down by a semitone to the 5th of the Dmin7 chord in the third bar. Only the 3rd and 5th of the Dmin7 are played before a chromatic link chord is used as a substitution for the G7 in the fourth bar. This is a D#dim7 chord: I've put the G7 in brackets in the written music, as I would be cautious about using this line over a G7 chord at a slow tempo (unless it was agreed with the harmony player that you were both going to play this substitution) as some of the notes would clash and it wouldn't really outline the harmony.

In bar five there is an Emin7 substitution for the Cmaj7, although only the root, 5th and octave with a chromatic leading note are played. In bar six a 7b9#5 is outlined (although the b7th isn't played) which alludes to either the Phrygian dominant or altered scales (both of which are commonly used on chord VI7) before a Dmin7 arpeggio is descended from its 5th down to its b7th in bar seven. In the eighth bar a 7#5 arpeggio is played before the line finally lands on the 3rd of the Cmaj7 chord in the ninth bar.

Hopefully this column will give you even more ideas for exploring walking bass, and the more you understand about how the bass relates to harmony, the more interesting your lines will become.

Kevin Sanders

Kev Sanders is a freelance electric and double bassist who has gigged and recorded with artists as diverse as singer Clare Teal and legendary saxophonist Pete King, to the Levellers and multi award-winning Korean classical pianist Ingrid Wu. As well as numerous BBC radio and television sessions, he's played over 4000 live gigs, appearing everywhere from Brussels to Broadway and as head of Bass Studies for AMS he developed and wrote both the full time Btec and Degree courses.

www.kevsanders.com

Ray's Gear

Most of Ray's career was spent playing his old Italian bass. This distinctive instrument, with its 'open' tuning pegs, can be seen on many of his TV appearances, as well as on the front of his popular instructional book *Ray Brown's Bass Method*. Legend has it that it was a gift to him from Ella Fitzgerald – to celebrate their divorce! The bass was huge, with a sound to match, but it was eventually deemed too fragile for life on the road and was replaced by another old Italian instrument made by Sylvestre. Throughout his life, Ray Brown saw huge advances in amplification for double bass, but stuck resolutely to the original Polytone amps and an Underwood pickup. He was a long-time user of Thomastik bass strings.

KEVIN SANDERS

I WANT TO PLAY LIKE... RAY BROWN

The jazz maestro under the microscope

Essential Ray Brown Tracks

'Mona Lisa', from *The Ray Brown Trio Live*
Ray takes the melody, with super-accurate intonation and a gorgeous bass sound.

'Quiet Nights', 'Have You Met Miss Jones','You Look Good To Me', from *We Get Requests* (The Oscar Peterson Trio)
Many would argue that Ray Brown, drummer Ed Thigpen and pianist Oscar Peterson made up the ultimate jazz trio. These tracks demonstrate Ray's melodic playing and soloing at its very best – the master at the top of his game.

'Ain't Necessarily So', from *Super Bass*
Ray playing with fellow bassists Christian Mcbride and John Clayton.

'It's A Man's, Man's, Man's World', from *Soul On Top* (James Brown)
One of Ray Brown's few electric bass recordings.

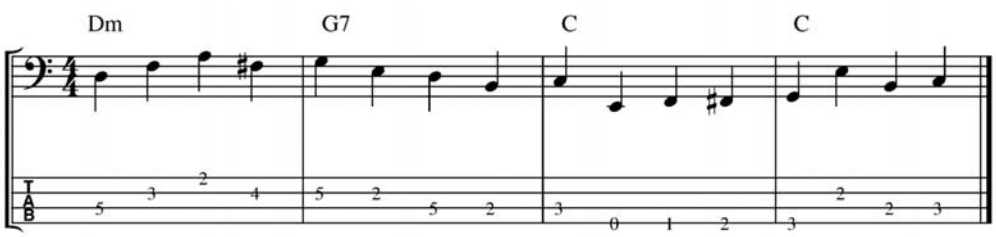
Forgive the blatant name drop, but I once met Ray Brown. I was working in LA at the time, and he was performing at the Catalina Bar & Grill, just down the road from where I was. He was playing there with pianist Jaff Keyser and during their break, I summoned the courage to go over to the table they were sat and say hello. "I can't talk to you here" he said. "Let me grab a couple of beers and we'll go to the dressing room where it's quiet." We spent the next half-hour talking about bass playing, teaching, jazz and, somewhat weirdly, pigs – the animals, not the LAPD.

Born in 1926 in Pennsylvania, Ray Brown is one of the outstanding bassists in jazz history. His career began in 1945 when, at the age of 19, he joined Dizzy Gillespie's band. A few years later he was leading a trio backing Ella Fitzgerald, whom he later married. In 1951 Brown joined the Oscar Peterson Trio, remaining with the group for most of the next 15 years. During that time he moved to Los Angeles where he lived for the rest of his life. He was in constant demand throughout his career, mainly due to his superb feel and tone. Although principally a mainstream player, he was equally at home playing hard bebop or slow, sleazy blues, and it was this ability to play in many different styles that kept him so busy for so many years.

Ray's Style

Although Ray Brown can't be credited with inventing walking bass, he cemented its accepted form more than any other bass player. Generally, his walking lines follow a simple formula. Take this simple II-V-I in C major:

Exercise 1



- The root note of the chord is usually stated on beat one of each chord change.
- The second note confirms whether the chord is major or minor – usually with the third, but often (as in bar two) with the sixth, second or seventh.
- The third note is often the fifth – emphasising the chord triad.
- The last note of the bar usually creates a tension, which is resolved by the root note played on beat one of the next bar. If the next bar is the same chord (as in bars three and four in the example) this last note will be part of a longer phrase, although usually creating tension to a note within the chord.

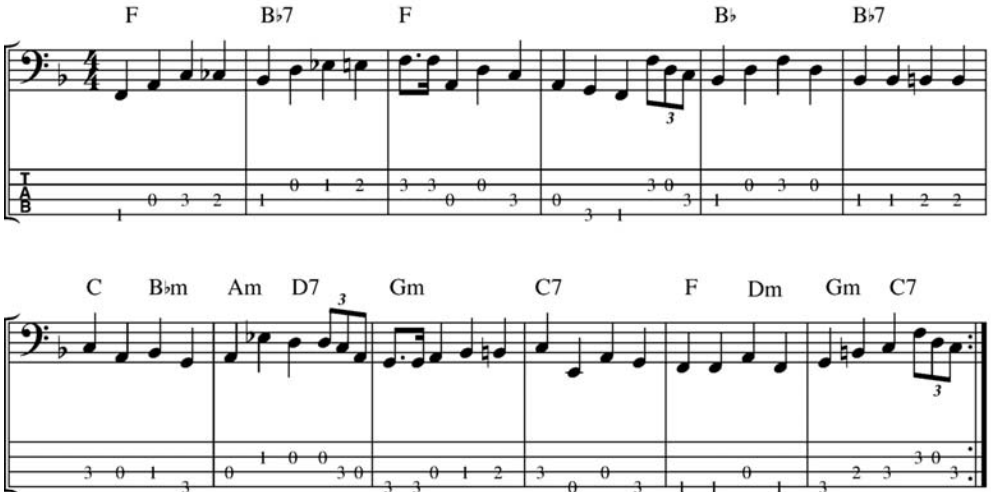
The Two-Beat Feel

Another common feature of Ray Brown's bass-lines – particularly when playing in the Oscar Peterson Trio – is the 'two-beat', half-time feel (usually root and fifth), often used through the 'head' of the tune. Brown would usually switch to walking bass-lines when the solos kicked off, while the drummer, working with Brown, made the transition from brushes during the head, to sticks on the ride cymbal for the solos.

The Biscuit Drop

This is something that Brown used on most of his bass-lines, particularly the slower 12/8 bluesy ones. It involves playing a quaver triplet group before a strong beat in the bar (usually one or three) as part of a walking bass line. This will often occur at a chord change. For instance, leading into bar five, where the IV chord occurs in a 12-bar. These are primarily rhythmic embellishments, so they'll be effective even if the notes' pitches are indistinct. Try this example:

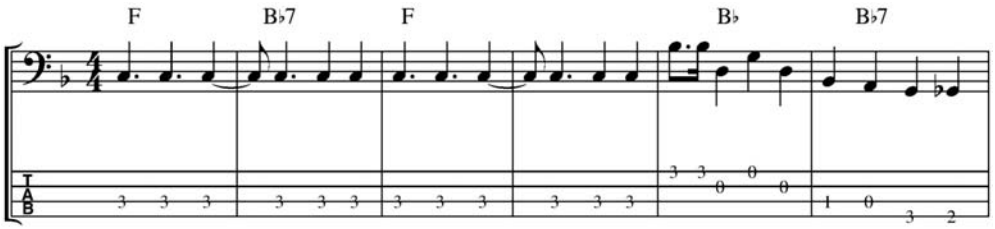
Exercise 2



Pedalling

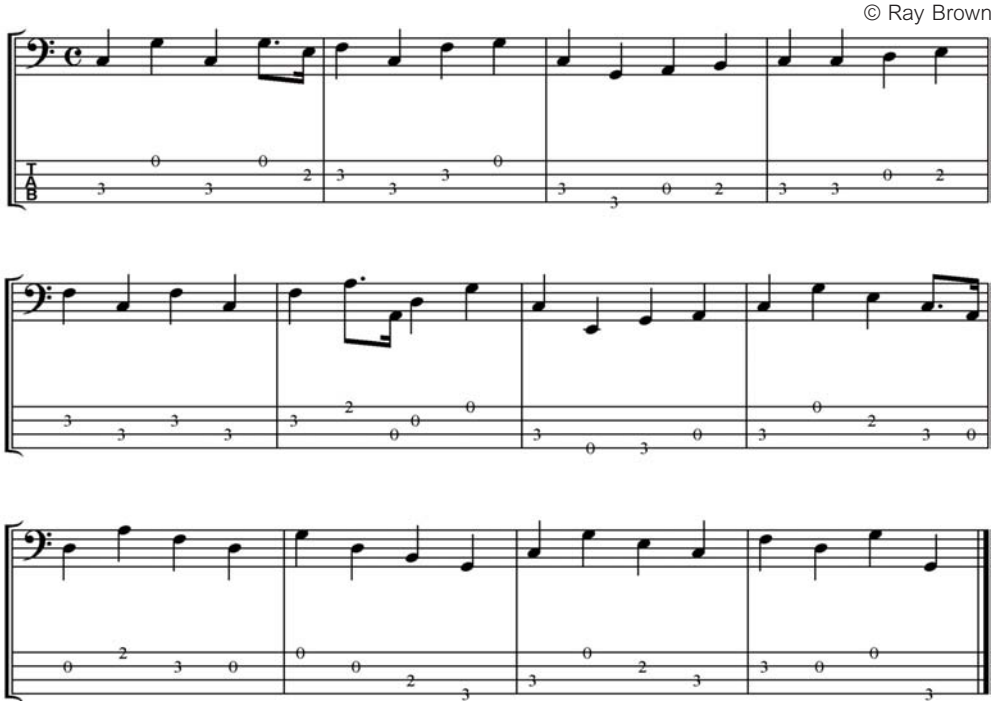
A great way to maintain building tension, perhaps as an intro or before a solo, is to play a 'pedal' bass line. Brown was a master at this. It involves simply holding a bass note a fourth below the tonic of the key of the song. So, if the tune is in say, C, then the bass pedals a G for two or more bars, until the tension is resolved at the start of the melody or solo, or until it becomes dissonant with the underlying harmony. See exercise 3 for an example of how Brown might have played the first six bars of the previous example using a pedal. Notice how the tension is held until bar five, where the bass plays the root of the chord.

Exercise 3



© Ray Brown

Exercise 4

Although we can analyse much of Brown's style in terms of notes and musical theory, this only gives a limited picture. Much of what made Brown so successful as a bassist was his timing and his tone. Play through this simple blues really slowly, at about 70bpm. Try using the pad of your right thumb to emulate a warm, string-bass sound, but most importantly, really concentrate on getting your tone and timing spot-on. If you need inspiration – just listen to Ray.

Dave Marks

Dave Marks is a busy freelance bassist living and working out of London. His playing and recording credits span a wide range of bands and artists, including Hurts, Nik Kershaw, Wishbone Ash, Julian Perretta, Larry Carlton, Albert Lee, Carl Palmer and many others.

At the minute his time is spread between pounding out eighth-note rock with the Rick Parfitt, Jnr band, touring with his 'RhythmMatters' masterclasses and depping internationally with Hurts and for *Thriller Live* on the West End.

Aside from his full playing, teaching and masterclass schedule, Dave maintains a heavy web presence, between his own site, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter pages.

For backing tracks to use with this lesson, visit ***www.davebasslessons.com***

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DAVE MARKS: MELODIC BASS PLAYING

MODES

Welcome to part six of my series on modes. This month: The Aeolian mode

Last month, we delved into the Mixolydian mode, one of the key sounds that underpins blues and funk music. This month, we're moving on to look at the sixth mode of the major scale, the Aeolian.

Figure 1 shows the notes of A Aeolian. You should notice that it contains all of the same notes as the C Ionian mode (major scale) that we looked at in our very first lesson. The difference is that now our point of resolution lands on the note A.

Figure 1

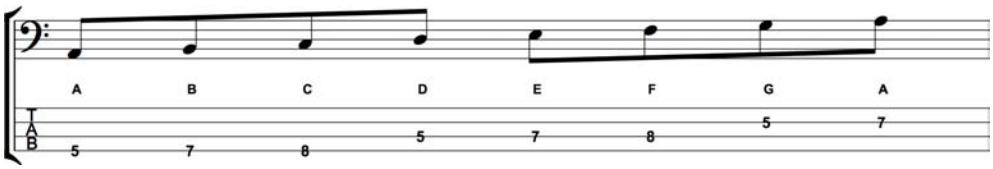



Figure 2 shows the A Aeolian mode in one octave. The fretboard diagram should help you picture the shape you'll be using. I'd advise using a one-finger-per-fret approach, with fingers 1, 3 and 4 on the E string, then 1, 3 and 4 on the A string, and 1 and 3 on the D string.

Figure 2

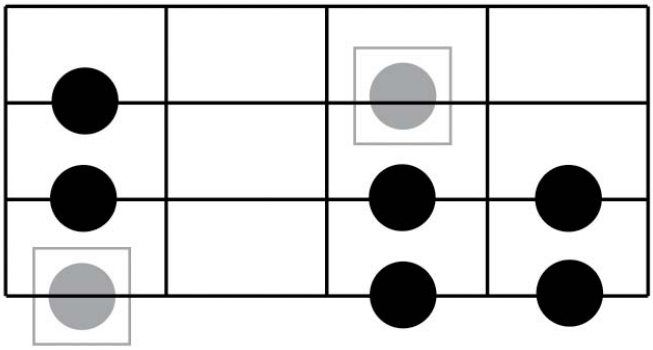
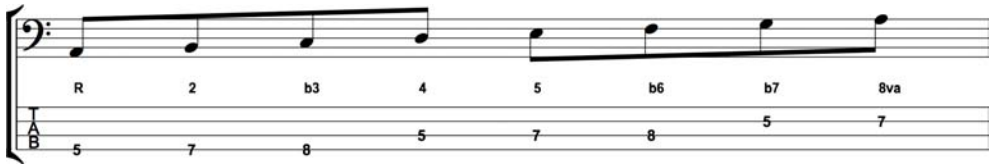


Figure 3 shows the scale degrees that are present when we play A Aeolian. If you isolate the I, III and V, you'll find A, C and E – the root, b3rd and 5th of an A minor chord. Add to that the b7th (G natural) and we have an A minor 7 chord to vamp over.

Figure 3

The Quality of the Aeolian Mode

We're entering familiar territory with the Aeolian mode, also known as the natural minor scale. When sadness is called for, the natural minor is the first choice for many musicians. If you wonder why Jaco's line on 'A Remark You Made' sounds so melancholy, it's his use of the Aeolian mode. The b3 and b7 establish a minor tonality, but it's the addition of the b6 that really makes the Aeolian feel sad. Let's start practising so that we can become more familiar with the sound and shape of the A Aeolian mode.

Figure 4 uses a very simple idea – play one bar of the groove and then one bar of the scale. We'll start by ascending the scale and when you've got that down, try starting from the top of the scale and descending, as in *figure 5*.

Figure 4

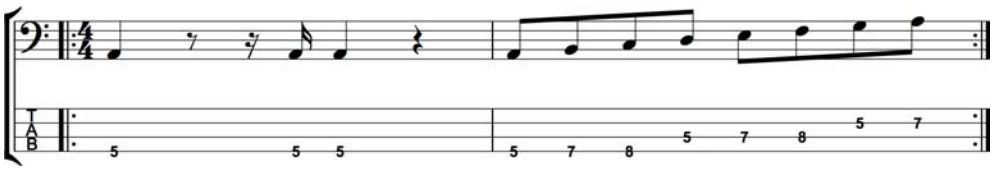



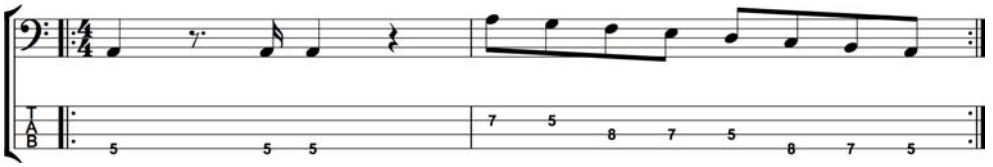
Figure 5

Let's expand that basic idea into a two-bar groove, with two bars of the scale. In *figure 6*, this idea allows us to ascend and descend across two bars. Make sure to repeat that top note A, so that the scale fits perfectly into two bars.

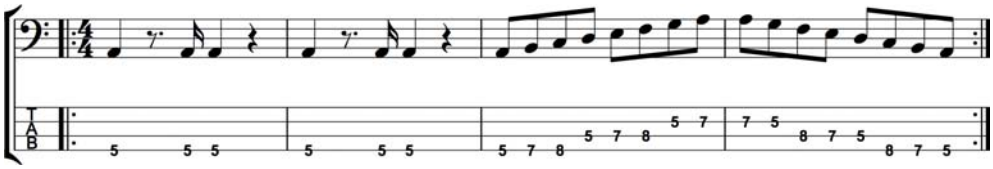
Figure 6

In *figure 7*, we start and end at the top of the scale – all the same notes, just the opposite movement.

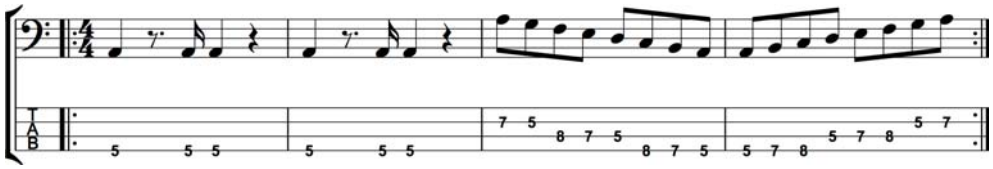
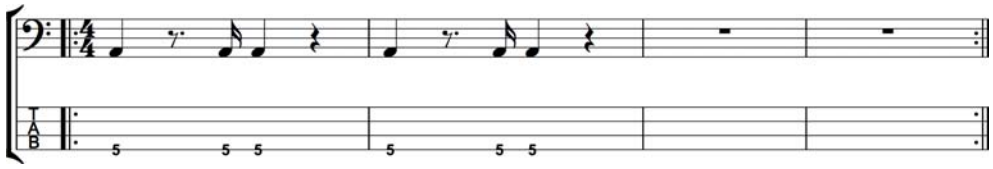
Figure 7

In *figure 8*, the last two bars are left empty so that you can begin improvising with the Aeolian mode.

Figure 8

To begin with:

- Play the ascending scale, but vary the rhythms to create different phrases.
- Repeat the same thing with a descending scale.
- Try creating a one-bar idea and doing an exact repetition.
- Try creating a one-bar idea and doing a repetition that ends differently.

These are just four simple ideas, but they should get you started with playing more freely around the Aeolian mode.

I've created a set of mp3s for this lesson, which you can download for free from www.davebasslessons.com. In them, I play through each example, discuss some improvising ideas and also provide two backing tracks for you to practise over.

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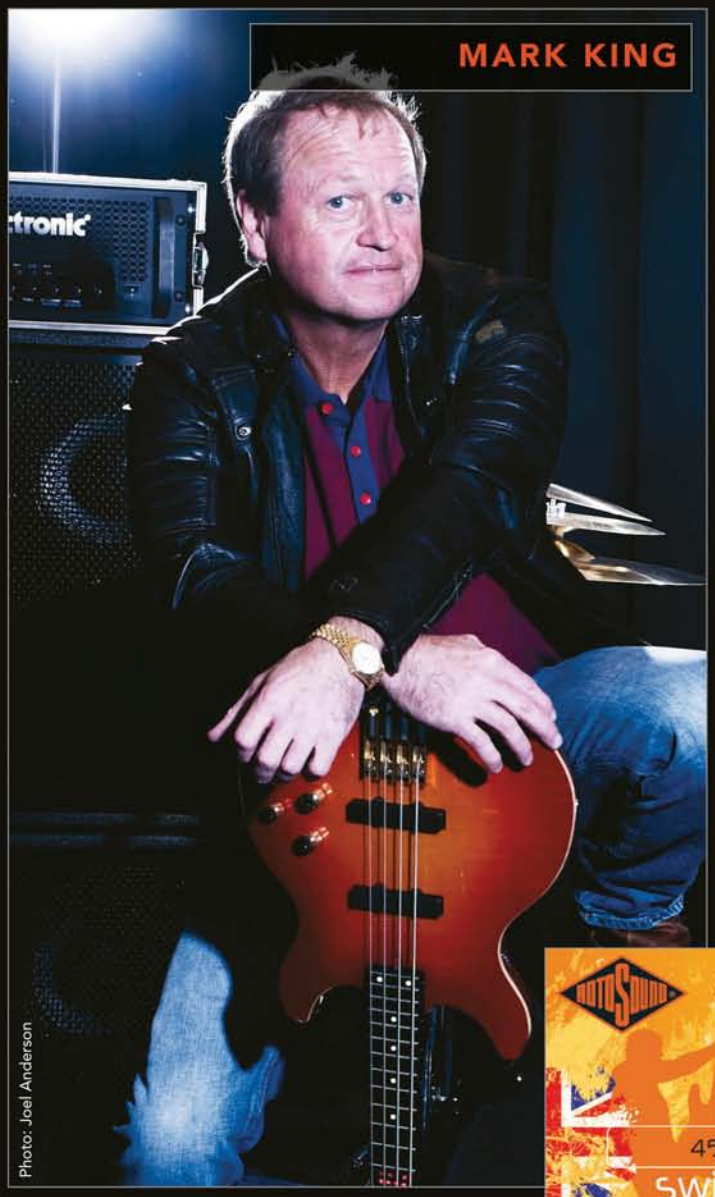

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